

NATURE AND THE SUPERNATURAL

A reply to a Critic

by Father John J. Hugo



[1945]

Contents

Nature & Supernatural

I. A Private Inquisition.....p. 4

II. Nature and the Supernatural.....p. 15

III. Odds and Endsp. 65

IV. Folly of the Cross.....p. 99

V. An Exaggerated Supernaturalism.....p. 112

Nature & Supernatural (continued)

I Introductory:

 The Battle of the Cardboard Soldiersp. 126

II The Criticismsp. 129

 § 1. A Lesson in Logicp. 129

 § 2. The Theology of Pious Naturalismp. 137

 § 3. Food for the Dogsp. 156

 § 4. Eat, Drink, and Carry your Crossp. 161

 § 5. Confusion Continuedp. 169

 § 6. Zealous for the Lesser Thingsp. 175

 § 7. Heresy Huntp. 182

III The Spirit and Method of the Attack.....p. 190

 § 1. The Spirit of the Attack.....p. 190

 § 2. The Second Lesson in Logic.....p. 192

IV The Misconcept of Sacred Theology.....p. 196

§ 1. Ever Learning, Never Attaining to the Knowledge of the Truth..p. 196

§2. The Impoverishment of Moral Theology p. 206

Reply to a Criticism

IN REPLY TO ORATE FRATRES.....p. 219

[The image of Our Lady of Good Counsel was drawn by Father Hugo and appeared in *Nature and the Supernatural: Continued*]

Chapter I

A Private Inquisition

The Occasion for This Reply

There has come into my possession recently a set of mimeographed sheets containing detailed criticisms of my book *Applied Christianity*. The criticisms appear above the name of the Reverend Francis J. Connell, C. SS. R., S.T.D., Catholic University of America.

That some should not like this book, I am of course quite prepared to expect. Each one has his preferences, in spiritual matters as in others, and it is up to the individual to choose such spiritual means, including books, as he finds helpful in his own case. These criticisms however, are more than an expression of preference or dislike. They are in fact of such a character that I cannot allow them to go without an answer.

They are divided into two groups. In the first group there are five "General Comments"; in the second there are one hundred and twenty-eight "Particular Comments."¹ Such a long series of objections has the effect, regardless of its intrinsic worth, of throwing suspicion and doubt on the competence or integrity of a writer. Superficial readers, not looking very carefully into the meaning of these criticisms, and not taking the trouble to study them in relation to the books will be impressed, even convinced, by the sheer accumulation of "evidence."

As a matter of fact, in spite of this seemingly formidable array, there emerges from my critic's remarks only one serious charge – and it is rather insinuation than a clear and definite charge –, which recurs over and over as the theme of the larger number of the Particular Comments. The remainder of the criticisms are miscellaneous, without any consistency or discernible drift running through them. Some, we shall notice, are contradictory and cancel one another. A terrifying appearance is achieved by the seemingly endless enumeration.

1. Only a "selection" of these has been mimeographed. The rest I have in a typed copy. Many of these objections have been incorporated into a book review published in the July, 1945, issue of "The Ecclesiastical Review." In answering the objections given on the mimeographed sheets, I will at the same time be answering the statements of the review; and it seems more useful to take the criticisms as stated in the sheets, as there are more of them and they are given more fully.

The Method of Criticism

In making up this list, any fault or infelicity of expression – or what the critic deems fault or infelicity – is put down as an “error.” All human works are imperfect; that mine is capable of improvement I do not doubt. That many of my critic’s suggestions would help me to clarify my thoughts and avoid misconstruction I will not trouble to deny. Even as it is I am glad to have an opportunity to explain my ideas further. But what I object to, and the reason why I feel that a reply is necessary, is that in every point of issue my critic attaches to my words some sinister “implication.”

As a matter of fact, surmises, innuendoes, “implications,” misunderstandings and, therefore, misrepresentations of the teachings in *Applied Christianity* are the substance of the criticisms and errors which my critic alleges. “Fr. Hugo seems to exaggerate...” – “The *implication* is...” “This statement is *dangerously like*...” – “To say that... *reminds one* of the doctrine condemned by Trent...” – “Two assertions seem to be present, at least *implicitly*...” Such is the stuff of the comments. Now if a hundred doubts do not make one denial, certainly one hundred twenty-eight surmises, guesses, “it seems to’s,” and “implications” do not make one clear, definite, unmistakable accusation. Multiply zero by one hundred and twenty-eight and you still have zero. Yet my critic, by following other rules of calculation, wishes to produce an indictment of heresy! At any rate, on such unsure foundations, he risks some really reckless charges. And it is to these, rather than to matters of detail, I now address myself. In this first part, therefore, I will consider the intimation of heresy. In Part II, I will take up one by one my critic’s General Comments. Finally I will consider the Particular Comments, at least the more important, under the title of “Odds and Ends.” Two of the Particular Comments, however, which open upon larger problems, I will treat separately.

The Nature of the Evidence

The heresy whose taint my critic wishes to attach to the teachings of *Applied Christianity* is nothing less than the grievous and odious one of Jansenism. So odious is it, indeed, that only in the interests of truth, and for the many who look anxiously to the issue of this controversy, can I bring myself to acknowledge and meet the charge.

White is white and black is black, and the difference between Jansenism and Catholicism is the difference between black and white. At least a doctor of theology should be able to detect that difference, especially in view of the fact that the Church’s teachings have been clearly and repeatedly enunciated on the matters wherein the Jansenists

offended. If, then, the teachings of *Applied Christianity* are Jansenistic, let my critic say so, clearly and unequivocally. At least once in a book of 217 pages he should find my heresy stated clearly! I could not be so clever as to keep it concealed always – at least in a book written, as he would say, to spread it; nor so clumsy of speech as not to be able, at least once in so much writing, to express my chief idea. To accomplish this I would have to have written a veritable masterpiece of double-talk and obfuscation, an achievement that I am much too modest to claim! But if the book is not Jansenistic, then let the critic cease from these deeply wounding innuendoes. Meanwhile, the reader should understand that the critic's observations are completely unofficial. His views are just that – his views; they have no official value. On the sheets containing his criticisms, there is no mention of credentials that would entitle him to speak for any competent tribunal within the Catholic Church. His comments, therefore, do not represent the Church's mind.

In making his one serious charge, my critic follows consistently the method just described. Nowhere is it stated clearly – yet everywhere it appears. For example, the word Jansenism is not mentioned among the five General Comments – yet the contentions he there makes are the real basis of his charge. But among the Particular Comments, he several times puts down some words of mine, then says that these words *imply* or *seem* to be like some condemned Jansenistic propositions which, according to the critic, *resemble* the ideas of *Applied Christianity*. Such propositions are the following: “That is not true obedience which does not proceed from charity.” “God rewards nothing but charity: He who lives for another motive or out of another impulse, lives in vain.” “The free will, without the help of God's grace, is good for nothing except sin.” “All the works of infidels are sins.” (Denzinger-Bannwart, 1016, 1405, 1027, 1025).

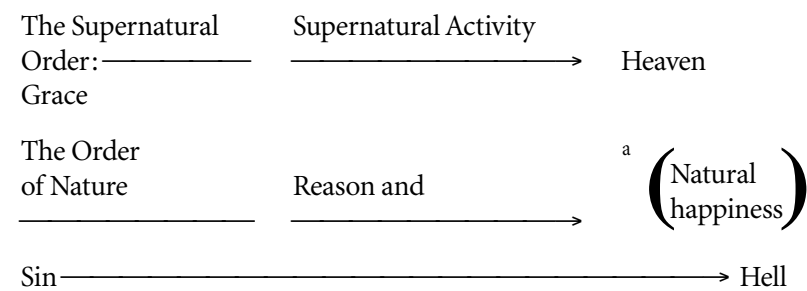
Now let us ask, first, what it is in these propositions that has caused them to be condemned. For it is one and the same principle that informs and falsifies them all. Indeed there are many other condemned Jansenistic propositions of exactly the same tenor. My critic might have multiplied them even more extensively. Or he might have limited himself to one. Even one would convey the same *meaning*. But of course, not the same *effect*. For, by quoting a number of these repetitious false propositions, the critic impresses and confuses the reader, who is misled by the very quantity of the “evidence” and brought to believe that where so much is erroneous, he can give credence to nothing.

The Fundamental Error of Jansenism

Now “the fundamental error” of Jansenism, as the Catholic Encyclopedia observes (article, “Jansenius”) “consists in disregarding the supernatural order”; and its other errors, notes Msgr. Pohle (*Grace, Actual and Habitual*, page 74), “may all be traced” to this denial.

Moreover, the false principle underlying all the condemned Jansenistic errors concerning nature and grace – a principle which issues immediately from their disbelief in the supernatural order – is their denial of a plane of good natural activity standing midway between sin (“dominant cupidity”) and the order of grace (“dominant charity”). I can explain this doctrine better, and my own relation to it, by referring the reader to a diagram on page 14 of *Applied Christianity* [p. 16 our edition]. There he will see the various planes of possible human activity one above the other. At the top is the order of grace issuing in charity and supernatural activity, leading to supernatural happiness. The lowest plane is sin, or evil, and it leads the soul to hell. Between these is nature, created by God, ruled by reason, and bearing fruit in a merely natural happiness – such happiness, namely, as was sought after by the great pagan sages, but was in fact, as a final end, removed from men by God when He elevated us to the supernatural.

Thus:



a. “Natural Happiness” is placed in parentheses to indicate its merely hypothetical character as a final end. See Note a on p. 16, our edition.

Now what the Jansenists do is to deny the middle plane of activity; or rather, they merge it with sin and evil; and, in doing this, they also drop grace from the supernatural order. To understand this, however, it will be necessary to consider more fully the whole scheme of salvation according

to their teaching.

They held that man's condition before the Fall was natural; according to them the preternatural and supernatural gifts of our First Parents were not supernatural at all, but natural, that is, due to their natural condition; and, had Adam and Eve not sinned, they could have merited eternal happiness, without grace, by means of the powers naturally belonging to them.

Then came the Fall: "As a result of Adam's sin, our nature stripped of elements essential to its integrity, is radically corrupt and depraved." [All this, of course, according to the Jansenists.] Original Sin did not then cause the loss of supernatural gifts, leaving nature itself substantially intact (as is the Catholic belief), but corrupted nature itself. "Mastered by concupiscence [again according to Jansenistic tenets], which in each of us properly constitutes original sin, the will is powerless to resist . . . It cannot escape the attraction of evil except it be aided by a movement of grace superior to and triumphant over the force of concupiscence. Our soul, henceforth obedient to no motive save that of pleasure, is at the mercy of the delectation, earthly or heavenly, which for the time being attracts it with the greatest strength. At once inevitable and irresistible, this delectation, if it come from heaven or from grace, leads men to virtue; if it come from nature or concupiscence, it determines him to sin." (*Cath. Ency., loc. cit.*)

The Transition in Thought

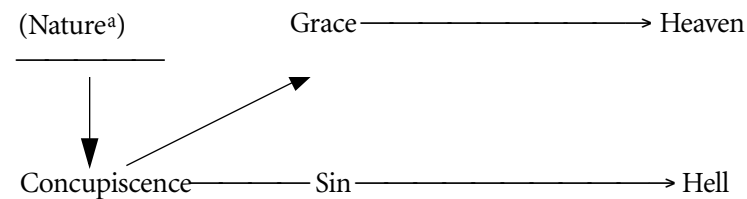
Perhaps you have observed what has happened to our diagram of the three levels: in the Jansenistic scheme, it has been reduced to two: concupiscence leading to sin; grace, leading to virtue and eternal life. The middle plane of good natural activity has disappeared.²

Something else has happened in the process also. Grace has been debased. It has lost its supernatural character. For the Jansenists, grace is simply a means to overcome concupiscence, it does but enable men to regain a power which had once been theirs by nature. It does not renew men inwardly; it does not deify them. "The gifts of primitive innocence, forfeited by original sin, are restored by Jesus Christ. Then and only then do they become graces, not, indeed, on account of their supernatural character, but because of fallen man's positive unworthiness. Aided by grace, the redeemed can perform virtuous actions and acquire merits for

2. For a further explanation of this twofold delectation and the two categories of actions, see St. Alphonsus De Liguori, *The Great Means of Salvation and Perfection*, Part II, Chap. III.

heaven.” (*Ibid.*, Article, “Baius”). But this does not involve a supernatural state or an infusion of sanctifying grace. Such is not necessary; so that aided by grace, “a catechumen before baptism, or a penitent before absolution [i.e., without any elevation to the supernatural plane] may, by simply keeping the precepts, have more charity than certain so-called just men.” (*loc. cit.*)

Two things have happened in the Jansenistic scheme of salvation: nature has become depraved, and therefore the possibility of naturally virtuous actions has disappeared; grace has lost its supernatural entity. And thus there are but two levels of activity:



- a. The word “Nature” is placed in parenthesis to indicate that, according to the Jansenists, nature existed in goodness and integrity only before the Fall. After the Fall it is radically corrupted by concupiscence; and grace does but place it back – without any inward renewal – to where it was at first.
Incidentally, this scheme also explains the falsity of Jansenistic austerity. This austerity was wholly without supernatural motivation, was based on an exaggerated and prideful conception of human powers, and took as its ideal of conduct the hard rigidity of Stoic Ethics.

It is in this way that Jansenism gets rid of the supernatural order: not by denying the existence or efficacy of grace, but by refusing to accept the Catholic doctrine that grace raises men high above a nature which is good in its own order to a plane of life and activity which is truly a participation in the divine life.

The Criterion of Orthodoxy

The essence and hallmark of Jansenism, therefore, is its denial of a middle plane of activity – that of nature – between “dominant cupidity” (sin) and “dominant charity” (actions impelled by grace). Accordingly, Pope Pius VI, in condemning the Jansenistic pseudo-Council of Pistoia, put his finger on the heart of evil when he proscribed the teaching which denies that,

“between dominant charity and dominant concupiscence, there are other middle acts (*affectus medii*) which proceed from nature, are in their nature praiseworthy, and finally, remain with us, together with a natural love of happiness and a natural tendency towards good, as the nethermost lineaments and vestiges of God’s image.”³ (D. B. 1524)

Thus, the affirmation of an order of good natural activity midway between sin and grace is the means of avoiding the two great (and closely related) Jansenistic errors in this matter. It saves us from the error of believing that, since the Fall, all natural activity is evil; and, at the same time, it prevents us from denying or underestimating the supernatural order, for it shows us that the effect of grace is to raise us above, *not sin merely*, but the divinely created natural plane itself. Thus, the affirmation of such good natural actions, is the very symbol of orthodoxy, being made such by this definition of the Holy See.

Now such an affirmation of an order of good natural activity, midway between grace and sin, is the basis and the very essence of *all* that is said in *Applied Christianity* about the supernatural life. I give it at the very beginning, and refer to it constantly throughout the book. The same idea appears in a thousand ways, in every chapter – I think it can be said without exaggeration, on every page. I have even drawn a picture of it! And yet the critic insinuates (only this!) that I am tainted with the very errors which I so clearly, and explicitly, and vehemently disown! He accuses me of denying the very principle which *Applied Christianity* was written to affirm! That principle is that man is raised by grace, not only above sin, but above the plane of *good* natural activity as well, to a divine state of adoptive sonship in which his norms of conduct and his end in life are supernatural.

Explanation of the Condemned Propositions

With the above points in mind we can now understand the reason for the Church’s condemnation of the several propositions quoted above, in whose errors I am supposed to be involved. When Baius says that there is no true obedience without charity, he is denying the excellence and the very existence of the natural virtues; or he is saying that what we call the natural virtues are evil; that there are no real virtues in the natural order.

3. The decree goes on to state that “if, between divine love, which leads us into the Kingdom, and unlawful human love, which is condemned, there is not conceded to be *a licit human love which is not to be reprehended as evil*” – such opinion is “false and otherwise condemned.”

It is the same with the others: he says that the natural faculty of the will itself is evil, that freedom is evil – in other words that there is no moral good in the natural order. Quesnel is guilty of the same error when he teaches that whoever acts from any motive or any impulse other than charity acts in vain; he moans that the natural virtues are worthless, without value, even evil. The identical error underlies the proposition that all the actions of the unbaptized are sinful. And every one of these errors (they are all basically the same error) results from the denial of a good natural plane of activity between the “dominant charity” (coming from grace) and “dominant cupidity” (sin). They result from the denial of the very doctrine which *Applied Christianity* makes its special aim and purpose to affirm, explain, and apply. Nothing could be more clearly opposed to Jansenism than the teachings therein set forth.

Accordingly, there is absolutely no point of resemblance between the condemned errors of Jansenism. and the ideas of *Applied Christianity*. Or, rather, they resemble each other as the night resembles the day. Page after page, chapter after chapter, I insist over and over upon the excellence and goodness of nature *in its own order* and upon our elevation by grace above the natural order. In every page of the book, my critic can find what I have called (and what the decision of Pope Pius VI, quoted above, bears me out in calling) the mark of orthodoxy in this matter, i.e., the explicit assertion of an order of morally good natural actions.

The Supreme Excellence of the Supernatural Order

It is true that while affirming the essential goodness of nature and of natural activity, I at the same time insist that the supernatural order is exalted above the natural order. I urge Christians to live a supernatural, rather than a natural, life. I even speak disparagingly of those Christians who, forgetful of their supernatural callings as sons of God, live simply as pagans on the good natural plane. But if I disparage natural standards of living, it is only in Christians that I do so, and I disparage it *only in relation to the supernatural order*. For I affirm and believe that, whatever excellence the ethics of Aristotle may have, the ethics of Christ are higher; and it is to follow Christ’s way of life, rather than Aristotle’s that Christians are called. I suggest no opposition between the two standards; I simply say that Christ’s way is higher, and His way should be ours. Will my critic deny this statement?

The Critic’s Own Error

My critic is led – or misled – into making his damaging accusations by the fact that he sees all things in terms of sin; he has what may be

called a “sin mentality.” He himself denies, at least in practice, the supremacy of grace and the supernatural order, for he thinks and at least equivalently asserts that grace elevates man only above sin, not above nature. This is shown by the fact that he knows only two categories of actions: sinful actions and supernatural actions. Whatever is not supernatural is, to him, *sinful*. And of course he thinks that my mentality is, or ought to be, the same as his. And therefore when he hears me condemn Christians for living natural lives, he inevitably concludes, on his principle that all which is not supernatural is *sinful*, that I am denouncing natural actions as *evil, as sinful*. The error is in *his* mind, and he wishes to attribute it to *me*. Thus he says – a statement that we will come back to later – that in *Applied Christianity* there “is an underlying idea that to have the desire of pleasure in performing an action is *sinful*.”

On the contrary, nowhere in *Applied Christianity* is there such an idea; and it is significant that he does not, and cannot, give one direct quotation illustrating what he calls the “underlying idea” from a book of 217 pages. What, in truth, I say, is that pleasure is merely natural. I do not condemn it as *evil*. I do not urge people to avoid it altogether, since this would be impossible. I urge them, since they are sons of God, not to make pleasure *an end*, as the pagans do, but rather to order their actions according to the higher supernatural end of seeking pleasure in God. What I say is that a soul who wishes to love and to increase in love, “sedulously deprives herself of *all other pleasures* that she may give herself more entirely to taking *pleasure in God*.” Is my critic suspicious of this statement? Does it perhaps savor of Jansenism? It is taken from *The Treatise on the Love of God* by St. Francis de Sales. (Bk. V. 7) The reader will now see why my critic is reduced to employing exclusively the method of insinuations – “implications” – “it seems,” “it is dangerously like,” “this implies.” Nowhere in any of my writings can he find a clear statement, or an equivalent statement, to the effect that nature, any element of nature, or any natural action, is *evil*, or *sinful*, or *wrong*. Nowhere does he, nor can he, quote one sentence of mine in which such a statement is made. His statements to that effect are from *his* mind, not from mine, and result from the patterns of thought – we will become more familiar with them – of the sin mentality.

Light from St. Augustine

St. Augustine says, in the course of his controversy with the Manichees, explaining this very problem of the relation of natural to supernatural conduct: “What a man forbids, he makes *evil*; but a good thing may be placed second to a better thing without being forbidden.”

(*Contra Faustum*, XXX,6.) Nowhere do I forbid natural actions as *evil*; nowhere do I forbid them at all. Everywhere on the other hand, do I place the good things of the natural order *second* to the better things of the supernatural order. Everywhere I urge Christians to relinquish the pursuit of natural good to obtain supernatural good, to leave natural justice for supernatural perfection, to sacrifice things good for things holy. And that, I believe, is the duty of a priest.

“God,” writes Abbot Marmion (*Christ, the Life of the Soul*, page 15), “might have been content to accept from us the homage of a natural religion; It would have been the source of human, natural morality, of a union with God conformable to our nature as reasonable beings, founded upon our relations as creatures with our Creator, and our relations with our kind.

“But God did not wish to limit Himself to this natural religion. We have all met men who were not baptized, but who were however, straightforward, loyal, upright, equitable, just and compassionate, but that can only be a natural goodness. Without rejecting this (on the contrary), *God is not content with it*. Because He has decided to make us share in His infinite life, in His own beatitude – which is for us a supernatural end – because He has given us His grace, God demands that our union with Him should be a *supernatural* union, a holiness which has His grace for principle.

“Apart from this plan, there is, for us, only eternal loss. God is master of His gifts, and He has decreed from all eternity that we shall only be holy in His sight, by living *through* grace as children of God.” (Italics mine.)

In Conclusion

To sum up, we have seen that the central and essential Jansenistic tenet, following directly from its denial of the supernatural order, is the elimination of an intermediate category of actions between those ruled by grace and those impelled by “dominant concupiscence.” On the other hand, orthodoxy in this matter is shown by the teaching, such as is given in *Applied Christianity*, of *three* categories of possible actions, i.e., those which are sinful; those which are supernatural; and, between these two levels, those which are naturally *good*. The reader will also recall that it is a decision of the Holy See pronounced against the Jansenistic errors of Pistoia which makes this affirmation the sign of orthodoxy. On the other hand, the mark of Jansenistic heterodoxy is the admission of only *two*

categories of actions, i.e., those which are sinful and those which are meritorious.

Now my critic obviously holds this latter position, a fact which is evident both by his denial of the orthodox teaching of *Applied Christianity* – heresy is the only alternative – and his own repeated statements to the effect that any action which is not supernatural is sinful.

Thus, he accuses me of asserting, “at least implicitly!”, that “whatever is purely natural is evil.” Again, there is no direct quotation to support this charge. Nor can there be, since it is nowhere said or “implied” by me. In fact, besides numerous incidental statements, one complete chapter (Part I, Chapter III), affirming and explaining the substantial goodness of the natural order, was placed at the very beginning of the book to preclude the possibility of any such misunderstanding. How, then, can the critic make such a statement as the above? By his flexible method of “implications”, and by attributing *his* categories of thought to *me*, as noted above, he is able to get the desired result. In the book, I exhort people to abandon merely *natural* activity, not because I regard such activity *as sinful*, but because I know that “a good thing [natural activity] may be *placed second* to a better thing [supernatural activity] without being forbidden” as *evil*. But not the critic, with his two Jansenistic categories of the sinful and the meritorious. Therefore, when he hears me say that certain natural actions are not supernaturally meritorious, *he* concludes that *I think* those actions are *sinful*. Thus we find that the critic is at one, in a very important point, with the heterodox teaching which he attempts to fasten on *Applied Christianity*. A case of the tea-kettle calling the coffee-pot black-bottom.

However, I do not wish to maintain, or even to suggest, that my critic is a Jansenist. The coincidence of his categories with those of the Jansenists results from the fact that his criticisms are animated by a certain spirit of naturalism, the heresy of the day, whose influence, as we shall see, has penetrated even among the elect, and of which Jansenism is itself a particular phase. Moreover, the method of proof is not fully trustworthy. By this too-handly method, indeed, one could easily “prove” Jesus Himself to be a Jansenist. Did He not say “If any man come to me and *hate* not his father and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple?” (Luke 14, 26) Does He not here *seem* to say that the natural love for members of one’s family is *evil*? Such a teaching, indeed, *sounds dangerously like* the thirty-eighth proposition of Baius, condemned by St. Pius V: “Every love of a rational creature is either vicious cupidity . . . or that praise-worthy charity by which God is loved . . .” (D. B. 1038) But even my critic, despite

his partiality to this form of demonstration, will agree, I am sure, that this, at least, is going too far!

Chapter II

Nature and the supernatural

I will now take up my critic's General Comments. There are five of them. This multiplication of arguments is achieved by numbering the paragraphs. There is, in reality, only one criticism, or, at the most, two (the fifth comment being a slight variation of the others). For this reason it will be possible to lay down, at the beginning, certain general principles that will provide a ground-work for answering all five. Afterwards I will take them up one by one. The General Comments are a summary of the particular ones; they are also the basis of the *intimation* of Jansenism. In considering each of them I will also consider some of the Particular Comments that are related to them. First, however, the preliminary remarks.

Preliminary Remarks

Our consideration of Jansenism has put us in a good position to understand these general criticisms, for it has already placed in our hands the key to the whole problem, i.e., the three categories of activity. To adapt some famous lines –

“A hair it is divides the false from true,
Ay, and a single Aliph is the clue –
Could you but find it!

Having before us the difference between the two-category and the three-category mentality, explained in Chapter I, we hold in our possession the “single Aliph” that opens up the difference between the false and true: could my critic also find it, his difficulties – and his charges – would vanish into the air. But because he insists on thinking in terms of two categories, instead of three, and insists also on forcing the same false mode of thought upon me, he completely misunderstands *Applied Christianity*, falsifies its teaching, and attributes to me principles that I simply will not acknowledge.

Thinking in terms of three categories, we distinguish three kinds of

actions: sinful actions at the bottom, supernatural actions at the top, and, between these, natural actions, good in their own order, the “nethermost lineaments and vestiges of the image of God.”

This scheme is reduced by two by eliminating the middle plane of good natural actions. The Jansenists accomplish this by assimilating natural actions to sin, regarding all natural actions evil. Quesnel, for example, regarded even the prayer of an unjustified man as evil.

My critic arrives at the same result by a somewhat different route, for he is influenced by an opposite phase of naturalism. The natural actions disappear from his scheme because they are entirely merged with the supernatural order. For him all natural actions become necessarily, invariably, and irrevocably meritorious by the mere fact that they are performed by a Christian. That is why, when he sees me, in *Applied Christianity*, reproaching those Christians who live on a natural plane, he accuses me of regarding nature as *evil*; he has no third category, no other pigeon-hole available. And he wrongly thinks that I suffer from a similar want.

If only the critic could find the missing Aliph! And yet it is right under his nose. It would be heretical to deny, at least in regard to the heathens, that there are good natural actions. The Church has condemned all those (Jansenistic) propositions which call all the actions of infidels and sinners evil. As a result, it is a certain truth that heathens can perform at least some good actions, i.e., naturally good actions. This teaching, of course, is based on the Scriptures: “When the Gentiles who have no law do by nature what the Law prescribes...” (Rom. 2, 14)

Christians also, retaining their human nature, retain the *capacity* to perform merely natural actions. Thus Our Lord said: “If you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? Do not even the publicans this? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more? Do not also the heathens this?” Msgr. Pohle comments as follows on this text:

“The meaning plainly is: To salute one’s neighbor is an act of charity, a naturally good deed, common even among the heathens, and one which, not being done from a supernatural motive, deserves no supernatural reward.” (*Grace, Actual and Habitual*, page 57)

Obviously, if this text shows the existence of naturally good deeds in heathens, it is equally a demonstration that such naturally good deeds may be found in Christians, for Our Lord is telling them they should not do as the heathens, implying certainly that they have the capacity to do

so.

Moreover, the decision, already quoted, of Pius VI against the Council of Pistoia, demonstrates the same fact; that between dominant charity and dominant cupidity there are certain acts in between (*affectus medii*) which are good in their own order. That the Holy Father had Christians in mind here appears from the fact that he speaks of “dominant charity” – for there is no theological charity in infidels (as such). Hence, Msgr. Pohle says that the existence of such naturally good acts is “a highly probable inference” from this decision of the Holy See. (*op. cit.*, page 71) Even if we adopt the theological opinion, to be taken up a little further on, that all good natural actions become at once meritorious in anyone having habitual charity, it is still necessary – and very useful – to distinguish natural actions, at least speculatively and hypothetically.

Of course I do not deny – in spite of my critic’s assertion to the contrary – that such naturally good actions are easily elevated to the supernatural plane. In fact, it is the contention of *Applied Christianity* that *all natural actions* may and should be supernaturalized. Thus it is there said (page 26 [p. 29 our edition]):

“However, we are not to leave this natural activity on the merely natural level; it must be elevated to the supernatural where it can merit eternal happiness for us.”

What I deny is that a good natural action, *simply because it possesses ethical goodness*, is supernaturally meritorious. To be supernatural it must proceed from a supernatural principle, i.e., from grace. That is why Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange says (I quote the remark from my critic’s comments) that “an act of natural virtue, such as temperance, is meritorious, *if it is ordained by charity to the reward of eternal life*.” How the critic can imagine he is quoting that principle *against* me I do not know; it is precisely the teaching of *Applied Christianity*.

Notice, however, that this great theologian does not say that an act of natural virtue, such as temperance, is meritorious because it is ethically good. No, it is meritorious, *only when* it is ordained to a supernatural end by *charity*. That is exactly what is said in *Applied Christianity*, for example (page 10 [p. 13 our edition]):

“Man’s supernatural life is made up of *all* actions that proceed from a supernatural principle, i.e., from grace and charity. *All* such actions are supernatural and therefore meritorious; i.e., they give us a real claim to supernatural happiness.”

Why such a principle is correct in Garrigou-Lagrange and erroneous in *Applied Christianity* is a mystery that my critic does not unravel,

On the other hand, even a naturally good action, if it is not performed under the influence of a supernatural principle (*ex caritate*, says St. Thomas) is not supernaturally meritorious. Thus Hurter observes, “It is certain that whatever is done without habitual charity, does not possess that goodness which is meritorious of eternal life.” (*Theologiae Dogmaticae Compendium*, Tenth ed., page 45). St. Augustine summarizes the whole matter, giving both sides of the truth: “Add charity to a man, and everything profits; take charity from him, and what remains profits him no longer.” (quoted from St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, XI, 2)

The Practical Problem

The Council of Trent requires, for merit, that a man possess grace, and that there should be an influx of this grace into his actions (D. B. 809). The practical problem is as to when there is such an influx of divine grace. Some theologians maintain (the opinion claims the authority of St. Thomas, although it is far from certain that he held it) that the mere presence of grace and charity in the soul is enough: These at once assimilate all good works to themselves, endowing even natural virtues with their supernatural excellence. In this case, it is contended, the immediate influx of grace comes through actual grace (sanctifying grace being presupposed), which is never wanting.

Others hold (St. Alphonsus may stand for them) that since grace requires our consent and cooperation before it can become effective, there should be some active consent and cooperation on our part. This will be guaranteed by a supernatural motive, virtually persevering; the required motive may be drawn from any of the supernatural virtues, like hope or fear, but the most efficacious is charity, which is indeed the final root and ruling principle of all the other virtues.

My critic cites both these theological opinions against me. Why, I cannot understand. I accept them both, although urging people to go beyond them both, not as an obligation, but out of love. The controversy is a dogmatic one in which it does not concern me to enter, much less to solve. My attitude in this matter is derived from St. Francis de Sales:

“Thus then, Theotimus, the virtuous actions of the children of God all belong to charity; some of them because she produces them of her own nature; others because she sanctifies them with her quickening presence; and finally others, by the authority and

command which she exercises over the other virtues, whence she makes them spring. And these last, as they are not so eminent in dignity as the actions which properly and immediately issue from charity, yet incomparably surpass those which take their whole sanctity from the mere presence and society of charity.” (XI, 4)

In this passage it will be noticed that three degrees of merit are distinguished. The first and lowest is the merit of those natural virtues which exist “in the presence of” charity: this corresponds to the opinion of the theologians who hold that all natural actions are meritorious if performed by one in the state of grace and under the impulse of actual grace. The second, a higher degree of merit, belongs to those actions and virtues which charity calls forth and dominates: and this corresponds to the opinion of those theologians who require at least a virtual supernatural intention to make good works meritorious. The third, and highest degree, belongs to those works which spring directly from divine charity such as the Saint calls the works of affective and effective charity. This third degree is the one which *Applied Christianity* – without denying the value of the other teachings, within their limits – would urge pious souls to strive for.

The first opinion, it should be noted, is not safe as a basis *for practice*. Even those who affirm its probable truth do not recommend it as a practical rule. “Probability is not sufficient where truth is required,” says Father Joseph Noldin concerning it – “*non iuvatur probabilitas ubi requiritur veritas.*”

This is as though a salesman were to say: “Here is a fine automobile. Although low in price, it is as reliable as any car on the road. Only I earnestly exhort you not to attempt to ride in it!” This opinion, therefore, may be accepted as a bright and consoling hope, holding out the possibility that when we arrive in eternity, we may find more treasure stored up for us than we had been aware of earning. But it should not be made the basis of practice; it is not and it certainly does not point the way to the best, the most generous, or the most perfect practice for fervent Christians. *And should it not be true* (it being only a probable opinion) then it is certain on the other hand that there may be, not only speculatively, but also in practice, and even in those who live habitually in God’s grace, merely good natural actions which remain merely natural until the soul, by cooperating with grace, raises them to the higher plane by means of supernatural motives. Father Edward Leen writes;

“It depends on the soul that this influence [i.e., of grace]

should be operative. Philosophers distinguish between acts that are of man and acts that are human. The latter are of moral value, the former are not. So it is possible for a soul, even in the state of grace, to elicit acts that are not inspired by grace. Such acts belong only materially to the soul, *as united* with the Saviour. They are what ascetical writers call natural acts, and being such, are not meritorious of supernatural life. Christ's merits do not enter into acts of this kind." (*The True Vine and Its Branches*, page 103)

However, this may be, those actions which spring from charity, as St. Francis de Sales has just said, "incomparably surpass those which take their whole sanctity from the mere presence and society of charity."

Let it be observed in this connection that my critic not only denies possibility of merely natural actions for those who are in the state of grace, but he also denies the fact – at least he takes no account of it – that there are different degrees of merit possible in good works. To him every work is either meritorious or sinful; and he speaks as if, in all meritorious works, there were only one invariable degree of merit, which it would be foolishness – or fanaticism – to try to increase by cultivating a more fervent charity.

With these principles in mind we can now go on to consider in detail the General Comments.

1. The Critic's First General Comment

"The author does not correctly present the relation between the natural and the supernatural. Two assertions seem to be present, at least implicitly, in many passages – first, that there is a contradiction between the natural and the supernatural; second, that whatever is purely natural is evil. It is true, in Appendix I, the author endeavors to justify himself on this score; but the defense is not adequate. It amounts to this – that natural motives in the abstract or theoretically, are good, but in the concrete, as they practically always exist, they are evil. Certainly, this is not the usual Catholic understanding of natural motives, at least as they may be present in persons having the state of grace. Such persons, even though they are not far advanced in spiritual per-

fection, may perform actions from a natural motive, even a motive that involves the desire of pleasure and self-gratification, and as long as the action they perform is not inordinate, and they have the general intention of directing all things to God, the supreme Good, the action is good and supernaturally meritorious. In other words, the *proximate* motive was natural, but the remote (ultimate) motive was supernatural, and that is all that is necessary.

“Evidently the author has no concept of this distinction between proximate and remote purpose (ultimate); yet, it is quite important in Catholic theology. He frequently quotes Father Garrigou-Lagrange. Now, in the treatise “*De Revelatione*” of this author (Chapter V, art. 2), he will find it stated that an act of a natural virtue, such as temperance, is meritorious, if it is ordained by charity to the reward of eternal life. In other words, the act is intrinsically an act of a natural virtue, yet it certainly is quite in conformity with the supernatural, and is even directed to a supernatural end by an act of charity. It should be noted here that all theologians are agreed that a virtual intention suffices to make acts of natural virtue meritorious. One does not have to have an actual intention in each one, referring it to God. This is very different from the author’s statement (P. I, page 42 [Cf. Part I, Chap. VI-I: The Doctrine of Imperfect Actions, p. 45]), that every action should proceed *singly* from charity. If a person frequently – for example, every morning – offers up the actions of the day to God, and is in that state of grace, then the naturally good actions of the day become meritorious. We are supposing that this offering is made out of divine charity.”

I answer as follows:

The essence of this objection – and of all the others – is contained in the first two sentences. As already shown, it is my critic, and not I, who misunderstands the relation of natural and supernatural; he does not understand that the latter is a superelevation above nature as well as above sin.

Of the two assertions, which, according to the critic seem to be in *Applied Christianity*, I will consider the first one under No. 4, where it can be treated more conveniently, i.e., the statement that I place a contradiction between nature and the supernatural.

The second assertion that is attributed to me – that “whatever is purely natural is evil” – is neither said nor implied anywhere in *Applied*

Christianity.

I simply repudiate such a view. It is not true that in Appendix I, I try to defend myself on this score. I would have no reason to defend a teaching that I do not hold. My critic says that my defense – i.e., the one I do not make – amounts to this: that natural motives in the abstract are good, while in the concrete they are *evil*. Nowhere do I say that they are evil; what I say is that they are only natural, and that they are therefore less good and less desirable than supernatural motives.

I admit, of course, fully, that I advise Catholics to abandon merely natural lives and natural motives, not however because I imagine them *evil*, but because I know them to be *less good*; and I know that Catholics are called to a higher, a supernatural life. In this I find myself at one with the saints:

“We do the same, Theotimus [i.e., as the phoenix and the silk worm, who die in their old mode of life], if we are spiritual; for we *forsake our natural life* to live a more eminent life above ourselves, hiding all this new life in God with Christ Jesus...” (*Treatise on the Love of God*, VII, 6)

“Certainly this is not the usual Catholic understanding of natural motives,” remarks my critic, i.e., that they are *evil*. Indeed it is not. It is not mine either, and no trace of such a teaching is to be found in *Applied Christianity*. The critic is able to attribute it to me only because of the erroneous pattern of thought in his own mind, i.e., the two categories of activity instead of three.

The next sentence of the criticism I also agree with, i.e., that Christians merit by good natural actions as long as they have a general supernatural motive. I have one reservation however. I am not so sure that the desire for pleasure or self-gratification is meritorious; and this point will be taken up explicitly later on in this chapter (No. 3). However, in any case, I do not say that the desire for pleasure is *evil*; only that it is natural.

Nevertheless, the merit of such actions is not great; they could be much more meritorious if they were more completely ruled by charity. It is the purpose of *Applied Christianity* to urge fervent souls to get as much merit out of their actions as possible. Hence, the insistence on supernatural motives: not that natural motives are regarded as bad, but supernatural motives are infinitely better.

The Matter of Immediate Ends

Therefore, the critic's next statement is simply false, as the reader can verify by looking into the book. He says that "Evidently the author has no concept of the distinction between proximate and remote purpose." Now the *chief rule* of practical guidance in the whole book is this: that Catholics should use creatures from a motive *of utility* (pp. 34-35 [p. 39 our edition]). What is such utility but a proximate end? Not only do I have a concept of such ends but I make that concept and distinction basic – quite in accord with my critic's correct remark that this distinction is "quite important in Catholic theology." The rule given in *Applied Christianity* is that Christians should in all their contacts with creatures, use them for the proximate end of utility, and make their *ultimate* end the love of God. What the critic objects to is my insistence on the love of God, but it is this which can best increase the merit of the actions. The intermediate end, the purpose of utility, may be perfectly legitimate; but it can neither give nor increase merit. The merit comes from the supernatural principle, and the stronger the influence of this principle is on the action, the more meritorious does the action become.

It is interesting to observe that, in one of the Particular Comments, the critic quotes a passage from *Applied Christianity* where this very truth – of which he here says I have no concept – is explicitly stated. But being a difficult man to please, he finds fault with this passage for another reason; it reads (page 33 [p. 37 our edition]):

"What we do, therefore (aside from sin) is unimportant; why we do it is the concern of God, and should be our concern."

Now obviously the sense of this passage is that any morally good or indifferent action can be made meritorious, that any legitimate human end may be sanctified – the very doctrine of which, it is said, I have "no concept". However, the critic pays no attention to the obvious sense; he has found, he thinks, a technical difficulty. He says:

"*What* a person does is important, not only why he does it. The first source of the morality of an action is in the object. The *finis operantis* [purpose of the one acting] is only a secondary source."

If the parenthesis, "aside from sin" had been omitted from my statement, there would be reason for the objection. As it is, there is none. A good intention cannot make a bad action (i.e., bad by reason of its object – stealing, for example) good. But the intention, good or bad, does determine primarily the morality of indifferent actions (i.e., walking);

and a good or bad intention has the decisive influence also even over actions which are good by reason of their object (so that almsgiving, for example, can become bad or imperfect by reason of a bad or imperfect motive). The parenthesis excluded intrinsically bad actions from consideration altogether; and my statement therefore means that all *other* actions – that is, good or indifferent actions – may become meritorious if they are ordered by charity to our supernatural end. It is a clear statement of the idea which my critic says I ignore and implicitly deny,

What is Required vs. What is Best

I agree that natural actions are meritorious if ordained in their final end by charity. That is the teaching of *Applied Christianity*. I agree also that the virtual intention is *sufficient*. But I do not agree that to make a virtual intention once in a while, and let it go at that, is the most desirable practice. Since more ardent charity can increase our merit, therefore the most desirable is to renew and purify the supernatural intention as often as possible. An unborn foetus, or an invalid hovering uncertainly between life and death, may be said to have life, but not the most vigorous possible life. So those who fulfill only the minimum requirements for merit have supernatural life, but do not in the most vigorous and active form.

There is a difference, therefore, between what is *demand*ed as a minimum condition for any merit, and what is *most desirable* to get the greatest possible merit. This, then, is the answer to my critic's statement that one does not have to have an actual intention in each act. I do not *require* an explicit supernatural motive⁴, but I do recommend and urge that Christians renew and purify their intentions for the sake of greater progress in perfection. Thus it is said, in *Applied Christianity* (page 29 [p. 32 our edition]):

“It is not maintained here that supernatural motives are necessary under pain of sin. The purpose is to show the way to the *fullness* and *perfection* of the Christian life.”

In the same vein Canon Saudreau writes:

4. The critic is in error when he says that, according to *Applied Christianity* (page 42 [p. 45 our edition]), every action should proceed *singly* from charity. What I say there is something altogether different, i.e., that even small attachments and imperfections mark an infidelity to divine love. Both the doctrine and the illustration are taken directly from St. Francis de Sales. (*Love of God*, X, 9)

“When the soul gives itself up to a good impulse by some consideration which is purely natural, the action is good, but it does not merit eternal life; or at least, if we admit with St. Thomas [i.e., the minimum opinion, cited above] that in a just man there is always a virtual intention of referring everything to God, the merit of this action is less than it might have been. It is a serious loss for the Christian soul. A director must make it plain that *simply* natural virtues, or virtues in which faith has such a slight part, are insufficient, almost valueless, for heaven. He must advise his penitent to act with more exalted intentions and from Christian motives.” (*Degrees of the Spiritual Life*, 1, 219)

If a man goes away from home to work, but writes faithfully to his wife every few months, sending her also sufficient money for her support, he may be doing his *strict duty*. But if he writes every day, thinks constantly of her, and is ever looking for ways to express his affection, then he is acting more like a husband and a *lover*. So if a Catholic occasionally refers his actions to God, he is doing his strict duty. But if he “prays always,” continually looking to God, “walking in His presence,” and referring his actions to Him very frequently, then he acts like a true lover. And are we not all to love God with our whole heart? And this can best be done by purifying the motives. Accordingly, St. Alphonsus De Liguori, who accepts the virtual intention as *sufficient*, nevertheless gives the following as the *desirable* practical rule for fervent souls:

“Endeavor to renew your intention *at the beginning of every action*, at least at the beginning of the principal actions, such as your meditations, Communions, hearing Mass, work, meals, and recreation; saying always, at least mentally: ‘Lord, in this action I intend not my own pleasure, but only the accomplishment of Thy will.’” (*True Spouse of Christ*, page 606)

There is another reason why the practice of renewing our supernatural motives is important: to purify our actions inwardly of sensuality or vainglory or any other unworthy motive, which, unless we are vigilant, finds its way into the best and holiest of actions. Thus vainglory, great or little, may enter even into religious actions: “Take heed that you do not your justice before men, to be seen by them: otherwise you shall not have a reward of your Father who is in Heaven.” (Matt 6, 1)

That such things can and do occur is the result of concupiscence, which remains in us, although diminished, even after baptism, to blemish many of our best actions. Concupiscence remains even in the just; so that the Council of Trent anathematizes those who would say that,

apart from a special privilege, like that enjoyed by Our lady, the just will not sin, at least venially. (D. B. 833) Concupiscence cannot be entirely repressed in this life; hence St. Thomas states:

“It is to be observed that the perpetual corruption of sensuality is to be understood of the *fomes* of sin: [concupiscence, the tinder, or seat of infection, from whence sin springs], which is never totally removed in this life: for while the guilt of original sin goes away, the effects remain. But this corruption does not prevent a man from repressing movements of sensuality, considered singly, if he is alert – for example, by diverting his thoughts elsewhere. Yet even while he diverts his thoughts to something else, it may happen that inordinate movements will arise concerning this also; as when one overcomes carnal delectation by turning to the speculations of science and then is disturbed by thoughts of vainglory.” (I II, 74, 3)

Therefore, spiritual writers and directors, seeing that concupiscence is a force to be reckoned with by those who pursue virtue, advise great vigilance over the motives, lest such imperfections get a foothold in the soul and soil our actions. For example, Père de Caussade, one of the great modern spiritual writers in the Church, speaks as follows (and it will be noticed that he goes much beyond even what St. Alphonsus, as quoted above, advises in regard to the motive):

“How is this purity of intention acquired? – By a great attention to one’s self at the beginning and above all during the progress of the actions.

“Why is this intention necessary at the beginning of our actions? – Because if these actions are agreeable, useful, *congenial to our natural tastes*, we are attentive by our impulse, by the sole attraction of pleasure or self-interest. Now we must pay very great attention and have great self-control to prevent our will from being led away at first by the impression of *natural* motives, which flatter, invite, and charm.

“Why did you add that this attention is above all necessary during the progress of our actions? Because though we have been strong enough at first to renounce all flattering attractions of the senses and self-love, in order to follow the views of faith by a pure intention, nevertheless afterwards if we forget to watch over ourselves well, the actual joy or pleasure that we feel, or the interest we find during certain action, always produces new

impressions on us, and our heart slackens its fervor little by little, our *nature* though crushed by its early renunciation, awakens and regains mastery: soon self-love slips in its selfish views, artfully and almost without our knowing; putting them in place of the good motives, by which our actions had been undertaken and begun. When it happens on countless occasions, as St. Paul says, that having begun by the spirit, we finish by the flesh.” (Quoted from Dom Chautard, *The Soul of the Apostolate*, Part V, #4)

It was the purpose of Appendix I, to which my critic animadverts above, not to defend myself, as he alleges, against the accusation that I regard nature as *evil*, but to show that nature, since the Fall, is likely to be pulled awry by concupiscence, and that, consequently, there is a distinction between nature, considered in itself and in its essential properties, which are wholly good, and nature as it is diverted from the perfection of virtue by concupiscence. If the critic does not accept this distinction, it can only be because he does not believe in concupiscence, i.e., in its reality as a moral force in our lives. That is why he can look upon the “desire for pleasure and self-gratification” as meritorious. That is why he denies that there can be, in any sense, a conflict between nature and the supernatural, despite the words of an earlier authority: “For the flesh lusteth against the spirit: and the spirit against the flesh; *for these are contrary to one another...*” (Gal. V, 17) And then the Council of Trent has also said: “This Holy Synod believes and professes that concupiscence or the *fomes* [of sin] remains in the baptized...” (D. B. 792) But those matters will be taken up more fully under No. 4.

The Example of Christ

One more word about the motive. It is the duty of Christians to imitate Jesus, It is also the duty of priests to urge the faithful to such imitation. Now the central rule in Jesus’ life, and the rule which governed every action, was to act from supernatural motives. He tells us so Himself: “I do always the things that please Him,” He said. (John 8, 29) In other words, Jesus never acted *except from supernatural motives*. At the same time, although human, He renounced purely human motives: “Because I came down from heaven, *not to do my own will*, but the will of Him that sent me.” (John 6, 38) This last text is of particular significance, since in Jesus there was no sin or concupiscence: it means that He renounced whatever human or natural motives might have come from His own immaculate humanity. He renounced the best possible natural motives to do always the will of His Father. Should my critic inquire, as

he does in several cases, “Where does Father Hugo get this interpretation of Scripture?” he will undoubtedly be interested to know that I get it from St. John of the Cross, according to whom Jesus Christ “in his life had no other pleasure, neither desired such, than to do the will of His Father, which he called His meat and food.” (*Ascent*, 1, 13) Moreover, “he that saith he abide in Him, ought Himself to walk, even as He walked”. (I John 2, 6)⁵

My critic, however, considers insistence on the utility of supernatural motives contrary to the spirit and teaching of Catholic theology. But it would rather seem that there is something faulty about his conception of theology, so clearly opposed to the words and example of Jesus.

2. THE CRITIC’S SECOND GENERAL COMMENT

“There is the underlying idea that to have the desire of pleasure in performing an action is evil. Now, the Church has declared that it is wrong to perform actions *merely* for pleasure (Denzinger, 1158, 1159), but that does not mean that pleasure may not be *one* of the motives of conduct. In general, it is not wrong to act for the pleasure of the act provided the action is not forbidden by the natural law (or some positive law) and a lawful end be not expressly excluded. Thus, Noldin says: “The act of the will by which pleasure, or a pleasurable object is sought *for the sake of pleasure* is lawful and morally good, provided the object is lawful and the desire of pleasure be moderated according to the rules of right reason.” (*Theol. Mor.*, I, n. 91) In other words, a person who seeks pleasure that is permitted, according to the natural law, is not doing anything wrong, but on the contrary, presuming he is in the state of grace, and has the proper inten-

5. See also St. Alphonsus De Liguori, who wrote a special chapter on this subject: “It was thus that Our Saviour always acted, doing as He several times declared, all things in order to do the will of His eternal Father: ‘I seek not my own will but the will of Him that sent me.’ (John 5, 30) In another place He says: ‘I do always the things that please Him.’ (John 8, 29) Hence, of Jesus it was justly said, that He had done all things well. And says St. John Chrysostom, if we imitate His example, and succeed in pleasing God, what else need we seek?” (*True Spouse of Christ*, page 604)

tion, he can merit by his action. If pleasure is sought moderately, the action can always have a good proximate reason, such as recreation, the preservation of health and good spirits, etc. And as was said above, if he is in the state of grace and has the proper intention from divine charity, he is meriting by his actions.

“To take some concrete examples. A married couple who use their rights out of desire for pleasure are doing no wrong, provided they observe the laws of nature. It would be interesting to apply the rigorous norms laid down by Father Hugo’s notes to marriage relations. Certainly the natural desire for pleasure is a very strong motive in the ordinary couple, however holy they may be. According to the norms prevailing throughout this book they would seem to be on the way to hell, even though they would never violate their conjugal duties, or refuse the children that God may send.

“Let us apply this principle of natural motives and the desire of pleasure to some of the desirable objects that Father Hugo especially condemns. Let us take the case of a priest, who is fond of smoking, enjoys a good meal, likes to go to the ball-game, listen to the radio, etc. Yet, he limits himself in these matters to the bounds of moderation. He does not smoke or eat too such a degree that he becomes sick, he does not spend so much time at ball-games or the radio as to neglect his work. He is faithful to sick-calls, the preparation of sermons, his daily meditation and office and visit, etc. Now it is a false application of Catholic principles to say that this priest, in the indulgence of these pleasures is committing any sin preparing the way for a fall from grace. He enjoys these pleasures, it is true, but his ultimate purpose is to recreate himself in body and soul, so that he can perform his priestly duties with greater zest and efficacy. It is false asceticism that would reprove a priest of this type. On the contrary, his recreation is meritorious, and in no way weakens his spiritual life.”

The reader by this time should be able to see what *underlies* the critic’s initial statement in this Comment.

“All seems infected that the infected spy,
As all seems yellow to the jaundiced eye.”

My critic’s thinking, infected by a “sin mentality” and by his two-category errors, attributes to me views that I do not hold. As I have already said, he produces no citation to illustrate my “underlying idea,”

either here or in the Particular Comments. Nowhere do I suggest that pleasure is *evil*. What I say is that it is a good of the natural order, which it is commendable to renounce from a supernatural motive.

My critic quotes Noldin to show that pleasure may be lawful and morally good, a teaching which I do not deny. But to say that it is lawful, means only that it is not contrary to the *natural* law; it does not mean that such pleasure is *supernatural* or is *prescribed* by the rules of supernatural living. In the *very same paragraph* from which he quotes, and just a few sentences ahead, Noldin had also stated: “Everyone can lawfully obtain for himself pleasures which are not harmful, provided that their use is so controlled by reason so as to be honest and morally good. *However, abstinence from them is to be commended as an exercise of virtue.*” (Noldin, *Theol. Mor.*, I, page 98, my italics)

That is what *Applied Christianity* contends. And in doing so, it no more implies than does Noldin that natural pleasure is *evil*.

Let Us Play

We will consider here the matter of recreation brought up by my critic. And let it be said at once that in giving the impression that *Applied Christianity* outlaws legitimate recreation, he is once more misunderstanding and misrepresenting its teachings. Recreation is, in fact, given special consideration in two chapters of the book (Part III, Chapters II and III). The purpose of the rules there set forth is, not to forbid recreation as *evil*, but to show how recreation, as in itself a merely natural activity, may be raised to the plane of the supernatural. The rules themselves are taken from Francis de Sales (*Introduction to the Devout Life*, Part III, Chapters 31 to 36). No doubt that writer is well able to take care of himself; there is no need for me to defend his rules, although I will quote some of them in Chapter III. For the present I will concern myself with the great central principle which should govern recreation. I begin by pointing out that the critic’s remarks apropos of the two examples he gives – the pleasure of the married couple and of the well-recreated priest – are simply irrelevant. There is no question, again, of their actions being, in themselves, *sinful*. The question, at least for a fervent Christian, is whether such actions are natural or supernatural. *Applied Christianity* does not merely condemn those who indulge in sinful recreations; it also condemns, although *not as sinners*, Christians who recreate themselves *as pagans*.

There are two ways in which you can judge the fitness of recreation, by natural or supernatural standards. If you judge by natural standards, you are interested in making your actions ethically good. You will judge

like a philosopher, watching to see that everything is done in moderation. And that is the way my critic judges, as is clear from the examples he gives in this Comment.

If you judge from the supernatural point of view, you will use a somewhat higher – though not contradictory – standard. You will judge as the Saints do. You will be interested, not only in the action's moral goodness – of course this is a prerequisite, since only morally good actions can become supernatural; but you will also be interested to see that it fulfills the requirements of supernatural perfection, i.e., that it is free from all blemishes of sensuality and selfishness and is animated by divine love. To determine this, the saints give us the rule of attachments. They tell us that we should be free from attachments to creatures, and to be especially watchful in regard to creatures which are attractive to us – such as recreations. The reason is, that such attachments diminish and weaken our love for God.

Thus St. Francis de Sales says:

“Sports, balls, festivities, display, the drama [would this enumeration by any chance include the ball games, good meals and radio entertainment of my critic's priest-friend?] themselves are not necessarily evil things, but rather indifferent, and capable of being used or abused. Nevertheless, there is always danger in these things, and *to care for them is much more dangerous*. Therefore, I should say that although it is lawful to amuse yourself, to dance, dress, hear good plays, and join in society, yet to be *attached* to such things, is contrary to devotion and extremely hurtful and dangerous. The evil lies not in *doing* the thing, but in *caring* for it. It is a pity to sow in our heart such vain and idle inclinations which occupy the place of better things, and hinder our soul from devoting all its energies to higher pursuits.” (*Introduction to the Devout Life*, I, 23)

In his comments and examples my critic shows not the slightest awareness of any such rule of conduct. He judges from the point of view of merely natural reason – for all the world like a pagan philosopher. He praises his priest friend for his moderation, condones the latter's love of pleasure *because it involves no sin*; and without showing the slightest interest in the condition of the man's heart, pronounces his actions meritorious. And of course, any contrary opinion is “a false asceticism!” Perhaps the critic, now that the matter has been brought to his attention, will be encouraged to expurgate next the little classic of St. Francis de Sales!

The Doctrine of Attachments

As a matter of fact, my critic not only ignores, but in effect denies, this doctrine of attachments; or to state the matter differently, he so modifies it as to nullify its force and value. This shows up particularly in a number of the Particular Comments, where, each time I speak of getting rid of attachments or affections for creatures, my critic “corrects” me by asserting that it is only *inordinate* attachments or *inordinate* affections that must be eliminated.

Yet, if you look carefully at the words just quoted from St. Francis de Sales, you will see that he does not warn Philothea against inordinate attachments to creatures; he warns her against attachments. So also St. John of the Cross:

“Any soul that would ascent this Mount in order to make of itself an altar whereon it may offer to God the sacrifice of pure love and praise and pure reverence, must, before ascending to the summit of the mount, have done these three things afore mentioned perfectly. First, it must have cast away all strange gods – namely, all strange affections and attachments...”
(*Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, Bk. I, chapter 5)

Once, again, we see a conflict between the critic and two Doctors of the Church. Why is this? Because *he* thinks like a philosopher, *they* like theologians. They are grieved when they see anything in the soul that lessens the love of God. He thinks only about the ethical goodness of natural actions and is concerned only about ethical disorder. He therefore approves any action that is not inordinate. i.e., that does not offend ethical norms and violate natural law. For this is the meaning of ordinate and inordinate actions; as St. Thomas says:

“For if something is done when it should, and as it should, etc., this act is well ordered and good (*ordinatus et bonus*); but if one of these conditions is absent, the act is inordinate and bad (*inordinatus et malus*).” (*De Malo*, Quæst, II, Art. 5)

The saints, however, assume the moral goodness of actions – since no other can be candidates for the supernatural merit. And their great anxiety is, not whether an action accords with the natural law (which is assumed), but whether it fulfills perfectly the great commandment of supernatural love, and they therefore warn us against all attachments or affections that would reduce this love; for, says St. John of the Cross, “affections for God and affections for creatures are contraries.” (*op. cit.*, Bk. I, Chapter VI) Thus, to insist on speaking of inordinate attachments

or inordinate affections, instead of merely attachments and affections, is to bring the discussion from the supernatural plane down to the level of natural ethics. That is, of course, what the philosophers wish to do. But that is exactly what those interested in living on the higher plane must not allow them to do.



The Definition of Sin

This subject will be illuminated by a parallel case, consideration of which will not take us away from our present subject, as it comprises my critic's fifth General Comment. I will digress therefore to consider this fifth criticism now instead of later, because of the light it affords on the present matter.

The critic's fifth (and last General Comment) reads as follows:

“The definition of mortal sin, frequently given by the author, is ‘an aversion from God and a conversion to a creature’ [what, in fact, I did say, is “conversion to creatures”]. This definition is not adequate – it should be ‘an *inordinate* conversion to a creature.’ Not every turning to a creature is a sin – it is only when the turning is opposed to the divine law that there is a sinful act.”

The reader will at once observe the parallelism with the preceding case: as the critic insists (wrongly) that only inordinate attachments are to be gotten rid of, so he insists (wrongly again) on a similar modification of my definition of sin. To show why this modification is not necessary, that the definition, as it stands, *is* adequate, will contribute greatly to an understanding of the whole subject.

My critic might have been warned. I did not pull that definition out of the sky. It is from St. Thomas Aquinas; so that, besides correcting me, he incidentally “improves” upon the Angelic Doctor. There seem to be good reasons, however, for retaining the unimproved version. Although St. Thomas in many places uses this formula, or some equivalent, he nowhere attaches the modification required by the critic. The material element in sin, he says, is *conversio ad creaturas*; you will look in vain for the improved version (see for example, *De Malo*, Q. III, Art. 7; Q. IV, Art. 2; *Summa Theol.*, I II, 32, 3).

The reason for this is not far to seek. There are two elements in sin: the material element and the formal. While the material element is

turning towards creatures – this being the manner in which the act of sin is performed –, the formal and determining element, that which makes sin malicious, and therefore sinful, is the turning away from God. Wherever there is a turning from God, there is sin, great or small. So that, when the turning to creatures goes hand in hand with a turning away from God, sin occurs *by that very fact*. Consequently, there is no need to speak about an *inordinate* turning towards creatures. Any turning towards creatures which involves a turning from God is by that very fact inordinate. It would not be correct to define sin as a turning towards creatures. But then I did not define it that way. I defined it – and this is correct – as a turning from God AND a turning towards creatures.

The Supernatural Love of Creatures

For this reason St. Thomas says:

“In any mortal sin the chief evil (*principalis ratio mali*) is in this that one turns from God, for if there could be a turning towards temporal goods without such a turning from God, even though it should be inordinate, it would not be a mortal sin.” II II, 20, 3)

These words explain why there may be – and under what conditions there may be, – a supernatural love for creatures. That there can be such a love I do not deny, although my critic erroneously accuses me of denying it.

It is incidentally spoken of many times in *Applied Christianity*, and, in one chapter (Part III, Chap. II) is taken up explicitly. And what is there said is substantially what St. Thomas has just said, i.e., that if we love creatures without turning from God, such a love may be supernatural. More positively, it may be said that if we love creatures in reference to God, and because of God, such a love is supernatural.

Observe, there is no question here of condemning a natural love of creatures as *evil*. It is condemned rather because men who are called to a supernatural destiny insist on remaining on a lower plane. Père Grou writes:

“The love of God does not allow of any division in my heart. God is supremely jealous and wishes to possess it entirely, because He deserves it all; He will have it to Himself alone, because He alone deserves it, He has made it for no other than Himself nor could He. If I turn the least of my affection away from Him to any creature in His place, I rob God of it; I take

away from Him that which is His by every right, and which He will not give to anyone else. I must love absolutely Himself alone, or loving others, I must love them for Him, in reference to Him, because He wishes and as much as He wishes me to love them. In this way, all the affections of my heart will tend to Him as their End and Aim, and will all unite in Him as their Centre. ‘We do not love Thee enough, O My God,’ says St. Augustine, ‘if we love anything else with Thee, and not for Thee.’” (*Meditations on the Love of God.*)

Is Such a Love Possible?

Is such a love possible? My critic insists that it is, and adds no qualifications. I believe that it is, too, but with certain qualifications. In adding these qualifications, I am following St. Thomas and St. John of the Cross. The critic does not reveal who his authorities are. Thus St. Thomas says that a supernatural love of creatures would be easily possible *in the state of original justice*, but in the fallen state of man there is a tendency for him to fall away to some private good.

He says:

“Man in the state of integral nature referred his love of self, together with his love of all other things, to God. And in this way he loved God above himself and above all things. But in the state of fallen nature man falls away from this through his rational will, which, by reason of the corruption of nature, follows its own private good (*bonum privatum*), unless this corruption is remedied by grace.” (I II, 109, 3) In other words, a supernatural love of creatures is only possible when there has been a purification of nature. To illustrate this, the words of Newman are quoted in *Applied Christianity* (page 20 [p. 23 our edition]):

“They alone are able truly to enjoy this world, who begin with the world unseen. They alone enjoy it, who first abstain from it. They alone can truly feast, who have first fasted; they alone are able to use the world, who have learned not to abuse it; they alone inherit it, who take it as a shadow of the world to come, and who for that world to come relinquish it.” (*Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol. VI, “The Cross of Christ, the Measure of the World”) St. John of the Cross, who, as a director of souls, views man practically, that is, in his fallen state, also demands a purification. No doubt he knew of the supernatural love of creatures and also practiced it himself. But he does not speak much about it. He speaks rather about that love of creatures, which, proceeding from concupiscence, tends to get between the soul and God, and which, therefore, must be removed by one who wishes to advance spiritually. Thus he writes:

“The reason for which it is necessary for the soul, in order to attain to divine union with God, to pass through this dark night of mortification of the desires and denial of pleasures in all things, is because all the affections it has for creatures are pure darkness in the eyes of God, and, when the soul is clothed in these affections, it has no capacity for being enlightened and possessed by the pure and simple light of God.” (*Ascent*, I, 4.)

The saint makes no modifications. He does not warn us against disordered affections, but against affections. The reason is that he is speaking to a fallen race and is moreover addressing beginners in the spiritual life. He describes things, not in formal philosophical terms (since the love of creatures, considered formally, or in itself, is a good of the natural order), but as he finds them in the concrete, i.e., corrupted, and in need of purification.

Thus, from the supernatural point of view, a disordered affection or an attachment is quite different from what is called a disordered act by philosophy and natural ethics. To a philosopher only sinful acts are disordered; from the supernatural point of view, an affection is already disordered if, in any degree, it turns us away from God. In one great sentence:

“It is not loving Thee enough, to love anything out of Thee, which we do not love for Thee.” (St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk. 10, Chap. 29)

This is why it is unnecessary – and even incorrect from the supernatural point of view – to speak of an *inordinate* turning towards creatures, or an *inordinate* attachment or affection for creatures. Thus writes Père Grou, commenting on the above words of the great bishop of Hippo:

“Hence our first rule is to love God sovereignly, and to draw as near as possible to the infinite love which He bears Himself. From this rule flows the second, which obliges us to refer to God every other love; that is to say, to love nothing out of God, but for His sake, and with a view to Him: insomuch, that if God have no share in our affections, it can be at the most but morally good; and if He be excluded from it, it will be formally bad.” (*Morality from St. Augustine*, XXXIX)

The Extent of the Definition

If the reader will now go back to the critic's fifth General Comment and read it again, he will observe that he confines my definition of sin (rather, St. Thomas's definition) to mortal sin. He says that this is the way I define *mortal* sin. Now this is not true. The definition applies to *all* sin, mortal and venial, and even to imperfections, which, according to the views usually taken by theologians, lack all guilt of sin. My interest extends to more than mortal sin. After all, *Applied Christianity* addresses itself to Christians who are seeking to lead a more fervent life and who are, therefore, presumably, free from mortal sin, or at any rate from any affection for it.

The purpose of Christian spirituality is to free souls from all sin and imperfection, at least deliberate sin, insofar as possible in this life, and not merely from mortal sin.

Now the definition of sin which we are considering is a generic definition of all sin. It is so intended by St. Thomas, who gives it as a definition of *actual* sin, not merely of mortal sin, and he even includes original sin within its scope (see the reference given above). Such a definition does not deny the specific difference between venial and mortal sin but it designates the generic elements common to all sins and imperfections.

The difference is of the greatest importance. A spiritual director who sees only mortal sins is like a doctor who becomes interested in a patient only when the latter is dead. A director, however, who wishes to help souls advance in the spiritual life will warn them against venial sins, imperfections, merely natural actions, through which so much grace is lost (or rather, not obtained), and which retard the soul in its labors for perfection. For such as these, St. Thomas's definition of sin is most important, for it reveals the constituent elements of sin, of all sin and imperfection, and it therefore offers a procedure for fighting against sin. These souls may learn from it that they are not only to avoid mortal sin, in which a creature is preferred above God as one's final end, but that they must reject any love of creatures, no matter how small, which is selfish or sensual or merely natural, and which, in other words, involves any turning from God whatsoever or any failure to turn wholly towards Him. That is the reason why St. Augustine says that it is not loving God *enough* if we love anything apart from Him, which we do not love for Him. To quote Père Grou again:

"I finish with observing that St. Augustine does not say, it is not loving God; but, it is not loving Him enough. All love that is

not referred to God is not criminal, provided it does not exclude this reference. It is a love which has only a moral goodness, which has nothing in it that is supernatural, which God neither will reward, or punish. There is no obligation under sin, of referring all our actions to God through the motive of charity: it is only a point of perfection to which it is proper to exhort the faithful. The contrary opinion [which is that of the Jansenists, described above, Chap. I] is an error condemned by the Church. Neither is there an obligation [i.e., under sin] of acting in the habit of charity, else all the actions of Infidels and of Christians in the state of sin would be so many sins, which the Church has also condemned.” (*op. cit.*)

This quotation describes perfectly the point of view defended here and in *Applied Christianity* and sufficiently distinguishes it from the error of the Jansenists. I will add only, in concluding this section, that, for the saints, an attachment and an affection for creatures mean the same thing. Certain critics, either misunderstanding this doctrine, or seeking to escape its practical consequences for themselves, attempt to make a distinction between the two words, saying that it is only attachments for creatures that we must avoid, while affections for creatures (so long as they are not inordinate!) are to be retained. The error of these critics is in their complete inability to distinguish between the natural and the supernatural love of creatures. Of course, the natural love of creatures is, in its own order, good! but it is only a moral goodness, often spoiled also by sensual motives, and in any case not yet a supernatural goodness, which it should be in a Christian. Hence it is right to say – we have seen St. John of the Cross saying – that we should get rid of our affections for creatures. He makes no distinction between attachments and affections. The critics in question, when they introduce it, are departing from the traditional terminology of Christian spirituality. St. John of the Cross uses the words indiscriminately, and he explicitly identifies them when he remarks that some souls “because they have not the courage to break with some whim or attachment or affection (which are all the same) ... never make progress or reach the port of perfection.” (*Ascent*, I, 11)



These Principles Applied to Marriage

I cannot consider that I have fully answered my critic's second General Comment until I have accepted his invitation to elucidate my views on marriage and marriage relations, with special reference to the "holy" couples, mentioned by him, in whom "the natural desire for pleasure is a very strong motive."

I regard marriage relations – sex in general – as a good of the natural order. That it can be elevated to the supernatural plane is evident from the sacrament of matrimony. So far my critic and I are at one. But we differ I think in this: that I consider this elevation to the supernatural plane, although accomplished by grace, somewhat difficult to maintain – since grace requires cooperation –, being attended by certain very real problems and temptations.

The most perfect use that we can make of natural goods is to renounce them: "The highest use of God's gifts is to give them back to Him again," says Father Faber. (*At the Foot of the Cross*, page 132) That this principle applies also to the natural good involved in marriage is demonstrated by a Priest's own vow of celibacy. His taking that vow does not *imply* that marriage or sex is evil – any more than his abstaining from meat on Friday *implies* that meat is evil: in each case he is returning to God a great good unused. Yet when in *Applied Christianity* it is urged that people practice renunciation of natural goods, my critic finds that this *implies* a view that natural goods are evil. Accordingly, he is of the opinion that I regard marriage – at any rate, the desire for pleasure in marriage – *as evil*, since he says that "according to the norms prevailing in this book, such a couple would *seem* [!] to be on the road to hell..." He says this though a priest's vow is the answer and explanation to what is meant by *Applied Christianity*.

Even in married couples there ought to be a certain spirit of renunciation; there is a kind of purity, and of chastity, proper to them. As we say that men living in the world cannot take the vow of poverty, but are nevertheless bound by the virtue and spirit of poverty, so we may say that married couples, according to their state, are bound by the virtue and spirit of chastity. Therefore, St. Paul tells them: "This therefore I say, brethren; the time is short; it remaineth, that they also who have wives, *be as if they have none...*" (I Cor. VII, 29) Again he urges them to make their love supernatural; "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church..." (Eph. V, 25)

Can it be said that the couples for whom my critic pleads, in whom "the desire for pleasure is a very strong motive" are acting as St. Paul

exhorts them, i.e., as though they were unmarried? Do such husbands love their wives “as Christ loved the Church,” with a religious and supernatural love? Perhaps to an extent; but their love is mixed with dross. However, I can understand that, human nature being what it is, such couples as the critic speaks of do exist; and I agree that their actions, so long as they do not violate their conjugal duties, *are not sinful*. But they are far from the desirable ideal sketched by St. Paul.

These couples do not reach, apparently do not even strive for the perfection realized in ancient times by such Christian couples as St. Basil the Elder and St. Emmelia, the parents of St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nyassa, and St. Macrina the Younger. They are far from the ideal realized in modern times by the mother and father of the Little Flower and her holy sisters. And it is in these, not in the couples defended by my critic, that the fullness of the Christian life is realized. And therefore, I wonder if priests should rest satisfied with the conduct and ideals of those who see in marriage a means of pleasure. While necessarily acknowledging the existence of such conditions, it would nevertheless seem to be the part of a priest to exhort them to pursue the ideal of conduct described by St. Paul. My critic, however, condemns such priests. And let it be noted that in saying that the desire for pleasure is very strong even in the holy, he is in conflict with St. Augustine, who shows, against Faustus the Manichee, who made a similar charge against the patriarchs of old, that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, although they had a number of wives and many children, were not influenced in their married life by the desire for pleasure. (*Contra Faustum*, XXII, 30-60)

It must be added that concupiscence, always strong, is especially strong in sex; according to St. Thomas (I II, 83,4) it is strongest here and in the closely associated sense of touch. Obviously, such concupiscence would assert itself in the desire for pleasure; so that even in married couples the desire for pleasure is not without its dangers. But my critic, neglecting the reality of concupiscence as a moral force, makes nothing of this. Hence, without any qualifications, he condones the pleasure-loving couples.

Others are not so complacent about the matter. A modern Catholic philosopher of sex, Dietrich von Hildebrand, enumerates, besides the legitimate use of sex, two dangers attached to it: it has, he says, a peculiar fascination, alluring and intoxicating; it also contains an “evil lust” which addresses “a diabolical appeal” to men. (*Defense of Purity*, Chap. III) He says therefore:

“No other sphere is so sensitive to the touch of illegitimacy.

Any breath of levity, any even momentary self-forgetfulness under the influence of passion, any abandonment to the passing moment, contradicts radically the significance of this union, its ultimacy, its seriousness and its irrevocability, and therefore always involves not only objectively, but subjectively also, a material impurity; indeed, in a certain sense a desecration.” (*Ibid.*, page 40)

To overcome the tendency to evil, and to elevate the sex relationship to its “full sublimity,” where “it springs from the background of a direct contemplation of God” (*Ibid.*, page 118), von Hildebrand prescribes as follows:

“Hence if this act is to be ennobled to the measure of perfect purity, love of the partner is insufficient; not to mention the simple purpose of propagation [nor my critic’s “very strong” desire for pleasure]; an upward glance to God, thankful and loving, and abiding reverently in His sight (*in conspectu Dei*) is indispensable.” (page 117)

Again:

“Wedded love, however, can perform this function only when it is consciously and deliberately anchored in God. Only when the spirit cleaves to God by an express act can it keep its head above the waves of animal life which at this moment break violently upon it.” (page 101)

If there is any truth in these remarks – and who can fail to recognize here the sublime ideal of Christian marriage? – how “holy” are the couples spoken of by my critic? Will they be ready for the necessary, explicit, “upward glance” to God? What chance have they, with their “momentary levity,” or their *unmortified* desire for pleasure, to keep their heads above the “waves of animal life which at this moment break violently” upon the soul? Perhaps these questions are answered in the Old Testament, where it is told that the seven husbands of Sara, although legitimately married, were killed by a devil, not because they violated the duties of marriage, but because they regarded marriage “as the horse and the mule, which have not understanding: over them the devil hath power.” (Tobias, 6, 17)

I will close those remarks by a quotation from G. K. Chesterton – a quotation that will summarize what has been said on this subject and will also suggest some reasons for my critic’s objections:

“What had happened to the human imagination, as a whole [in the ancient paganism], was that the whole world was colored by dangerous and rapidly deteriorating passions: by natural passions becoming unnatural passions. Thus the effect of treating sex as only one natural innocent thing was that every other innocent natural thing was soaked and sodden with sex. For sex cannot be admitted to a mere equality among elementary emotions or experiences like eating or sleeping. The moment sex ceases to be a servant it becomes a tyrant. There is something dangerous and disproportionate in its place in human nature, for whatever reason; and it does really need a special purification and dedication. The modern talk about sex being free like any other sense, about the body being beautiful like any tree or flower, is either a description of the Garden of Eden or a piece of thoroughly bad psychology, of which the world grew weary two thousand years ago.” (*St. Francis of Assisi*, Chap. II)

Whether it is owing to a bad psychology, or to preoccupation with the Garden of Eden, or to both (as seems most likely), the attitude of my critic, being that of a priest and theologian, goes far to explain the failure of Catholic priests and teachers to stem the tide of modern paganism, which is little less soaked and sodden with sex than was the ancient one.



A Matter of Taste

I will conclude these remarks on my critic’s second General Comment by returning to the priest whose fondness for recreation started us out on this inquiry. We have agreed that he needs recreation. We have agreed that recreation is a legitimate human end and morally good. We have agreed that recreation may be elevated to the supernatural plane. Still I confess to my misgivings about him. That he is *fond* of smoking, that he *enjoys* a good meal, that he *likes* to go to the ball-game and listen to radio entertainment, makes me wonder about him – despite the fact that he so carefully observes *moderation*. Neither he nor his defense counsel seem to have given sufficient attention to the one great rule for supernaturalizing recreations:

“Especially avoid *attaching* yourselves to them, for however allowable such things are as amusements, they become *evils as soon as they absorb the heart*. I do not mean that you may not *lawfully* take pleasure in your amusement, otherwise it would

not be a recreation, but you must not be devoted to it or eager and absorbed in it.” (St. Francis de Sales, *Devout Life*, III, 31)

Perhaps indeed, the priest in question is not devoted or eager or absorbed in his recreations; perhaps they do not absorb his heart. Then all is well. His actions are, as his spokesman says, meritorious, and he is presumably on the road to eternal life – but up one of the winding side-roads which St. John of the Cross indicates on his map of Mt. Carmel, not up the direct and straight road upon which is written, “Nothing, Nothing, Nothing...”

In any case, this priest ought to be more tolerant of priests who think differently than he does. No doubt his pleasures – in moderation – are good. It is St. Paul who tells us so, in opposition to those who said that the use of creatures is evil: “For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be rejected that is received with thanksgiving.” (I Tim. 4, 4) Yet the same St. Paul, who thus defends all natural goods as truly good and not to be rejected, himself rejected them. Not, indeed, as a sinful, but as a lesser good. Nay, more, in comparison with Christ, whom he gained by this renunciation, he counted them but as “loss.”

“Furthermore,” he said (Phil. III, 8), “I count *all things* to be but loss” – this from him who defended all things as good! But then he explains: “I count all things to be but loss *for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord.*” And that this might not seem like any idle boast, any hypothetical piece of renunciation, he asks: “For whom I *have suffered* the loss of all things.” And then, overcome by the immensity of his love for this new Master, and comparing Him with all things, he cried out: And I COUNT THEM BUT AS DUNG, that I may gain Christ.”

Let my critic’s friend be fond of his smoking, enjoy his meals, like his baseball and radio entertainment – as long as he observes due moderation – and has no *attachment* for them. But let neither of them criticize others, who, for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ Our Lord, count ALL these things but AS DUNG.

3. The Critic’s Third General Comment

“Catholics are supposed to mortify themselves – that is, to restrict themselves; even in respect to pleasurable objects that are not sinful. But this does not mean that there is any obligation to eliminate *all* pleasurable things. The Church gives us a good norm in prescribing abstinence on *one* day of the week. On the other days, we may eat meat within the limits of temperance prescribed by the natural law, and enjoy the natural pleasure of it. Similarly, in the matter of personal self-denial, we should at

times restrict ourselves in respect to something that is perfectly pleasurable. Certain great saints have doubtless been called to a self-denial of this type; but it is not obligatory or even advisable for ordinary Christians, whether clerical or lay. It is better to take up certain practices and persevere in them, rather than to go to extremes and then give up all mortification after a while. This is what often happens in the case of extremists.”

It will be possible – and the reader will be no more than thankful than the writer – to answer this criticism more shortly than the preceding ones. In fact, I will not answer it at all, but I will let St. John of the Cross do it for me and will merely add some words of explanation. St. John of the Cross writes (this is the second of three general rules intended for beginners):

“Secondly, in order that he may be able to do this well [i.e., imitate Jesus], every pleasure that presents itself to the senses, if it be not *purely* for the honor and glory of God, must be renounced and *completely rejected* for the love of Jesus Christ, who in this life had no other pleasure, neither desired such, than to do the will of His Father, which He called His meat and food. I take this example. If there present itself to a man the pleasure of listening to things that tend not to the service and honor of God, *let him not desire that pleasure*, neither let him desire to hear them; and if there present itself the pleasure of looking at things *that help him not God-ward*, let him *not desire the pleasure* or look at these things; and if in conversation or in aught else soever it present itself, let him do the same. And similarly with respect to all the senses, in so far as he can fairly avoid the pleasure in question; if he cannot, it suffices that although these things may be present to our senses, *he desires not* to have the pleasure. And in this wise he will be able to *mortify and void* his senses of such pleasure, and leave them, as it were, in darkness. And having this care he will soon profit greatly”. (*Ascent*, 1, 13)

Obviously, if as my critic says, “There is no *obligation* to eliminate *all* pleasurable things,” there is at any rate high authority for believing that it is well, and a means of progress in perfection, to eliminate even *all* pleasurable things so far as this is possible. It would then appear that the critic is carrying moderation itself to an *extreme* when he says that “we should at times restrict ourselves in something that is perfectly pleasurable.” Indeed, although my critic speaks much of temperance, he nowhere states that, in Christians, there is a supernatural virtue of

temperance, quite different from the natural temperance practiced by the pagans, and from the point of view of the latter itself an extreme, since, according to St. Thomas, it “abandons, so far as nature can bear it, what the body demands. (I II, 61, 5)

The above words of St. John of the Cross will explain why I make a reservation, when dealing with the first General Comment, concerning the statement that “the desire for pleasure and self-gratification” are, not merely morally good – the critic is not satisfied with this – but even supernaturally *meritorious*. The pleasure seekers at any rate abound in hope: they not only want their pleasure in this world, but for pursuing it, a supernatural reward in the next. But can we be so perfectly sure of this? Can we be sure that (as a little girl once said in a classroom) “God made us to enjoy ourselves in this world and to be happy with Him forever in the next?” St. John of the Cross at least suggests a doubt.

There are some who would waive John of the Cross aside as an extremist, saying that he represents only one school of spirituality, and that they will rather follow less strict theologians. It should be evident from the preceding paragraph that there is no conflict between any school of theologians and St. John of the Cross. However, his concern is to guide souls, not to formulate theological or philosophical principles; although his teaching remains entirely faithful to formal theological and philosophical truth.

In this connection, it must be emphasized that there is only one spirituality: that of Christ, that of the Gospel. The only legitimate sense in which we can speak of special schools of spirituality – such as the Carmelite, the Benedictine, the Jesuit, the Franciscan, the Dominican, or Sulpician, or Redemptorist – is to indicate that those different groups give varying emphasis to the several principles of Christian life, or, from among many possibilities, choose particular means to practice *Christian* spirituality. Carried beyond this, the expression is an abuse of language, misleading and dangerous. Therefore, St. John of the Cross either speaks for Christian spirituality, whose basic and essential principles are common to all particular schools, or he does not. If he does not, then we need pay no more attention to him than to an Oriental bonze or dervish or pundit. But that he does speak as an authentic interpreter of Christian spirituality is guaranteed by his elevation to the almost incomparable dignity of Doctor of the Catholic Church.



My critic is nothing if not moderate – but, alas, not in accord with supernatural temperance – in his requirements for mortification. He takes as a good norm, as in fact his maximum norm – aside from the saints, who are especially “called to a self-denial of this [more extreme] type” – the practice of the Church “in proscribing abstinence on one day of the week.” Anyone who would advise more than this is a rigorist, or a fanatic, or a Puritan, or (in my critic’s own word) an extremist.

We are accustomed., in the dispute between Fascism and Communism, to the mode of argument which proceeds by fixing opprobrious tags to opponents. We have seen that it does not help much in the cause of truth, but it does get *results*. It is even so in the matter of mortification: to label those who preach it gloomy or rigoristic or extreme or Puritanical is a great triumph – for the devil. In the *Screwtape Letters*, Screwtape, an old devil, long experienced in tempting, gives instructions to his nephew, a mere tyro in the diabolic art. Among other things he says (page 55):

“All that [i.e., warnings by spiritual writers, among other things, about worldly vanities] your patient would classify as ‘Puritanism’ – and may I remark in passing that the value we have given to that word is one of the really solid triumphs of the last hundred years. By it we rescue annually thousands of humans from temperance, chastity, and sobriety of life.”

In any case, what my critic considers a norm, even a maximum beyond which “it is not obligatory or *even advisable* for ordinary Christians, whether clerical or lay,” to go – is not so considered by others. Father Frederick William Faber, for example, says:

“We must remember also that according to the teaching of Scripture, it is quite a mistake to regard as some unthinkingly do, the practice of mortification as a counsel of perfection, and a work of supererogation.

When carried to a certain degree, or when expressed in certain ways, it is doubtless so. But mortification in itself, and to a certain degree and under given circumstances, is of precept and necessary to salvation. This is not only true of the self-inflicted pains which are sometimes of obligation in order to overcome vehement temptations, or of those various mortifications which are needful in order to avoid sin. But a definite amount of fasting and abstinence, irrespective of the temptations or circumstances of individuals is imposed by the Church on all her children under pain of eternal damnation.” (*Growth in Holiness*, page 165.)

These words, from a great spiritual writer and director of souls, mean that the schedule fixed by the Church is an absolute minimum, not

a maximum, and that the faithful are to be encouraged to go beyond this minimum if possible. This opinion is confirmed by St. Francis de Sales, Doctor of the Church and unparalleled guide of those who, living in the world, yet aspire to sanctity. His gentleness and prudence are well known. Nevertheless he says:

“If you are able to fast, you will do well to observe some abstinence *beyond what is enjoined by the Church*... The early Christians practiced abstinence, especially on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. Do you fast on such of those days as may be dictated by your devotion and by your director.” (*Devout Life*, III, 23)

This saint also recommends, for the laity, although with certain reservations, the use of such instruments of penance as hair-shirts. He also advises the use of the discipline, saying that,

“Taken in moderation, it has a wonderful power of awakening the appetite for devotion.” (*loc. cit.*)

Before leaving the company of these “extremists,” we will listen to just one more word from one of them:

“When, therefore, men say that they do not practice mortification, but leave it to those who wish to be saints, they may on being questioned show that they are sound in doctrine, and do not mean the error which their words, strictly speaking, imply; but we may be sure that the very use of such loose language is a proof that a real error about mortification is deeply imbedded in their minds. (Faber, *loc. cit.*)

4. The Critic’s Fourth General Criticism

It reads as follows:

“Fr. Hugo seems to exaggerate the harm done to human nature by original sin. According to the more probable view, human nature is no worse off, essentially, since the fall than if man had been created in a purely natural state. In other words, the concupiscence and other evils resulting from the fall have come about through the loss of the preternatural gifts, not through the weakening of nature in its purely natural powers. As theologians in modern times are wont to say, human nature is worse off, not intrinsically, but only extrinsically than it would have been in a natural state.” (Tanquerey, *Theol. Dogm.*, II, n. 910)

There are two opposite exaggerations possible in the matter of original sin. The one is that of the Pelagians, who denied the existence of original sin in us, held that man is no worse off now than before the Fall, and said that the transgression of Adam influences us only by way of a bad example. The opposite is that of Jansenism, which, as we have seen, regards concupiscence as sinful, holds that human nature is radically and essentially corrupted by this sin, and that therefore all the actions proceeding from nature are evil. It is the Jansenistic extreme that my critic would attribute to me, with, however, his customary caution (“Fr. Hugo *seems* to exaggerate...”.) I think that I have already sufficiently cleared myself of this charge, and I will not return to it, wishing merely to show its connection with this present comment. Nevertheless, what is said here will corroborate what has been said on this score elsewhere.

The Meaning of Concupiscence

We have already seen, under the first General Comment, but also in other places, how my critic denies the reality of concupiscence: not indeed by any explicit denial, which would make him a heretic, but by everywhere minimizing its influence, by making no provision for it in recommending a practical course of action, by refusing to admit that our fallen nature is in need of purification, by denouncing as exaggerated everything in *Applied Christianity* which urges the need of overcoming its influence. In other words his statements show a clear tendency towards the extreme of Pelagianism: a fact which helps to explain why he regards the teaching of *Applied Christianity* on this point exaggerated.

Now the existence of concupiscence as a real moral force, even in the just, has been affirmed as an article of faith, we have already noticed, by the Council of Trent. Other truths defined by this Council are to the point here. It says (D. B. 792) that, although St. Paul calls concupiscence sin, it is not to be understood as a sin strictly so-called. This is directed against Lutheranism, Calvinism and, by anticipation, Jansenism, which has been called “the bastard offspring of Protestantism.” But the Council then explains why it is that St. Paul calls concupiscence sin, i.e., because it results from sin and inclines towards sin (*Quia ex peccato est et ad peccatum inclinatur.*)

Everything in *Applied Christianity* that speaks of the influence of concupiscence is based on those words, “*et ad peccatum inclinatur* – and inclines toward sin.” It is this truth, or its practical implications, that my critic impugns by attacking the book; failure to appreciate this truth – yes, even to the point of denying it, at least in the practical order – is the reason and background for this fourth General Comment, together with

the many Particular Comments that are intended to illustrate it.

The Explanation of Original Sin

Against me, the critic cites the “more probable” theological teaching that human nature is no worse off essentially and intrinsically after the Fall than before it; or, in other words, that our human nature, since the Fall, is intrinsically the same as it would have been if God had created us in a state of pure nature; or, finally, in still other words, that our nature has not suffered any intrinsic deterioration as a result of original sin. According to this view, favored by almost all modern theologians, having been given a great impetus by St. Thomas, we, in our fallen state, may be compared to the children of some great public figure, who, guilty of treason, is punished by the confiscation of his property and by the suppression of honors and privileges accorded him. We, like that man’s heirs, are much poorer by the loss of privileges which, except for our First Parent’s sin, we would have inherited; but that loss does not affect our natures intrinsically or substantially.

Now far from rejecting this explanation of original sin, I am in complete accord with it. While I do not take it up or explain it in *Applied Christianity*, I certainly do not oppose it. If I were to employ any explanation of original sin this is the one I would favor. But the matter is not taken up at all in *Applied Christianity* and that for the reason that this book is intended to be, not a theological treatise, but a manual of piety, and only an outline at that; while the explanation of original sin is a technical theological problem the understanding of which presupposes considerable knowledge of philosophical and theological terms and concepts. It is not necessary for the passengers of a ship to understand the principles of celestial navigation: it is sufficient if the pilot has mastered them; similarly it is unnecessary for all who pursue piety to understand the problems and principles of theology: it is sufficient if their spiritual guides have such knowledge and are thereby enabled to guide souls through hidden dangers.

Such an omission is also justified by the consideration that, in any case, facts remain facts, whatever the explanation for them. Scientists once explained light as being composed of waves, I think; now they say it is made up of rays: but the change in the explanation has not changed the intrinsic nature of the effects of light. Scientists may explain electricity one way today and another way tomorrow – in fact they may, for all I know, make a really revolutionary change in their hypotheses concerning electricity this very afternoon at some learned convention; but their decision, one way or the other, will not cause a flicker of interest or

surprise in the behavior of our electric toaster tomorrow morning.

So it is with concupiscence. Explain it as you will, it still exists; the explanation does not change the thing. I do not mean for a moment that the explanation is unimportant. It is vastly important as a matter of doctrine. But Christians became saints before St. Thomas had opened up this new possibility of truth; that is to say, without the explanation, they overcame concupiscence. And after Catholics had St. Thomas's explanation to assist them, some still became sinners; in other words, the explanation alone will not save us. The stubborn fact remains, however you explain concupiscence – however consoling the view you take of it – that now, even as in the days of St. Paul, the “flesh lusteth against the spirit: and the spirit against the flesh.” (Gal. 5, 17) It still remains true that, because of concupiscence, “if you live according to the flesh, you shall die.” (Rom. 8, 13) It still remains true – alas, who of us does not know it? – that “when concupiscence hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin. But sin, when it is completed, begetteth death.” (James 1, 15) The Council of Trent did not give us an explanation of concupiscence; but it did set down, as an article of faith, the dogmatic *fact* that concupiscence although itself not a sin, nevertheless “inclines to sin, *ad peccatum inclinat*.”

The Divers Movements of Nature and Grace

It is this *fact* which my critic compromises. Evidently, in this Fourth Comment, he is using the theological explanation of original sin, not so much to explain it as to explain it away. He emphasizes that nature is intrinsically the same now as before the Fall in order to impugn what I have written about concupiscence. He would have us believe that nature, even in its fallen state, is so essentially pure and good, that there is really no such thing as concupiscence, or at least that there is no reason to be alarmed about it; one who is alarmed about it is guilty of exaggeration. Apparently he has not recently read St. Paul's: “For I do not that good which I will; but the evil which I hate, that I do... For the good which I will, I do not; but the evil which I will not, that I do. Now if I do that which I will not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.” (Rom. VII, 15, 19-20)

This is why the critic (in his First General Comment) has listed among the errors that *seem* to be present in my book, the teaching that “there is a contradiction between the natural and the supernatural.” I will now set my critic's doubts about that matter at rest. I *do* teach it; I do hold, *that in a certain sense*, there is a contradiction between nature and the supernatural. Furthermore, in teaching this I find myself in accord

with the Scriptures, with the Council of Trent, with the teaching and example of the saints. Nor does such a position conflict with the other truth that there is harmony between nature and the supernatural, nor with the axiom that grace perfects nature and does not destroy it.

In a word, it is correct to affirm that, at one and the same time, there is *both* a harmony and a conflict between nature and the supernatural. This is why, in *Applied Christianity*, there are two chapters dealing with this subject: one is called, “The Harmony Between the Natural and the Supernatural”; the other is “The Conflict Between the Natural and the Supernatural.” There is harmony because nature is essentially good, since its author is God, Who is also the author of the supernatural. There is a conflict because, since the Fall, man is pulled away from his true good towards the vain, the perishable goods of the earth. This is why St. Paul, speaking of the spirit and the flesh, says that “For these *are contrary one to another*, so that you do not the things that you would.” (Gal. 5, 17) I wonder if my critic has ever read the following:

“My son, take good heed of the motions of nature and grace, for they be very subtle and much contrary, the one to the other, and hardly may they be known asunder, unless it be by a ghostly man that through spiritual grace is inwardly illumined in soul...

“Nature will not gladly die, nor gladly be oppressed or overcome; neither will she be gladly under another nor be kept in subjection. But grace studieth how she may be mortified to the world, and to the flesh.

“Nature inclineth to the love of creatures, to the love of the flesh; to vanities and runnings-about, and to see new things in the world. But grace draweth a man to the love of God and the love of virtues; she renounceth all created things, she fleeth the world, she hateth desires of the flesh, she restraineth liberty and wanderings-about, and escheweth as much as she may to be seen among recourse of people. Nature hath gladly some outward solace wherein she may sensibly delight in her outward wits. But grace seeketh only to be comforted in God and to delight her in His goodness above all things.

“This grace is a light from heaven, and a spiritual gift of God. It is the proper mark and token of elect people and an earnest-penny of the everlasting life. It lifteth a man from the love of earthly things to the love of heavenly things, and of a carnal man maketh an heavenly. And the more that nature is oppressed and

overcome, the more grace is given, and the soul through now gracious visitations is daily shaped anew and formed more and more to the image of God.” (*The Imitation of Christ*, III, 54)

Naturalism vs. *The Imitation*

I wonder if my critic is among those up-to-date Catholics who regard the spirituality of the *Imitation* as gloomy, unCatholic, slightly morbid. There is such a group, of a more enlightened spirituality, who from time to time, for the reasons mentioned, attack this precious little masterpiece, which has proved so powerful a collaborator with the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of literally innumerable souls. And of course the center of this attack is the very chapter that I have just quoted. The reason is that the spirit of these critics is one of naturalism, a spirit that defends nature, even the wayward tendencies of concupiscence, at the expense of grace. They hate and oppose any doctrine that would teach them to mortify nature, depriving them of their precious natural pleasures. I do not say that my critic is among those of whom I am speaking. But his spirit is certainly akin to theirs.

In Appendix I of *Applied Christianity* I dealt with this matter. This was the Appendix in which, according to the critic, I put up an “inadequate” defense against the “implication” that nature in the concrete is *evil*. What, in fact, I defend in this Appendix is the doctrine that we are now speaking of: that nature is essentially in harmony with the supernatural, but, owing to the Fall, there is now a conflict, since concupiscence pulls nature aside from the Creator to creatures. In that Appendix, in order to explain this, and to preclude any misunderstanding on the subject, I quoted an illuminating passage from Father Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange. Perhaps my critic did not see it. I will therefore quote it again. It will show that the “gloomy” spirituality of the *Imitation*, and the doctrine that there is a conflict between nature and grace, is completely in accord with traditional Christian thought and does not in the least degree contradict the teaching of sound philosophy that grace is in harmony with nature and does not destroy it.

“In respect to the supernatural life, we know the principle of St. Thomas: ‘Grace perfects nature and does not destroy it.’ A great spirit of faith is necessary, however, if we are always to interpret this principle correctly without inclining towards naturalism. Some persons [!] will understand this principle materially, or will be more attentive to nature which must be perfected than to grace which should produce this transformation in us. Furthermore, considering human nature as it actually is since original

sin, they will not sufficiently distinguish in nature that is essential and good, what ought to be perfected, from what ought to be mortified: egoism under all its forms, gross or subtle. By failing to make this distinction, they find a real opposition between the doctrine of St. Thomas, thus materialistically interpreted, and the famous chapter of *The Imitation*, “On the Divers Movements of Nature and Grace.” They forget what the holy doctor teaches about the wounds consequent on original sin which remain in the baptized soul.” (*Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, page 54. Italics mine.)

The True Meaning of St. Thomas

St. Thomas teaches the essential goodness of nature. He holds that, intrinsically, nature is the same now as before the Fall. He asserts that concupiscence itself is natural, is therefore not a sin, was in man in the state of innocence, although then fully controlled by the gift of integrity, and that its evil tendency comes from the fact that, since the Fall, we do not have this preternatural gift to check and regulate it. He also teaches that grace does not destroy nature.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, he does not minimize the effects of the Fall. He teaches that man was *wounded* by the Fall. (I II, 85,3) He speaks of our nature as being *corrupted and infected* by the Fall. (II II, 25, 15) He shows that, as a result of it, there is a four-fold wound in us all (III, 85, 3); the wound of ignorance, by which the reason is deprived of its alignment with truth (*destituitur suo ordine ad verum*); the wound of malice (*malitia*) by which the will is deprived of its alignment with good (*destituitur ordine ad bonum*); the wound of weakness, by which we are rendered less able to persevere in pursuing the good which is difficult to attain; finally the wound of concupiscence, by which our appetites seek to escape rational regulation in their desire for pleasure. He teaches that, in a certain sense, the good of nature is, as it were, diminished, though never destroyed or substantially changed, by the fact that its tendency to evil is strengthened, its tendency to good weakened. (I II, 85, 1 ad 2) He teaches, finally, that concupiscence remains after baptism, diminished thereby, but not destroyed, (III, 69, 4 ad 3)

His teaching on concupiscence is very beautiful and consoling; but, unlike my critic, he does not use his explanation to deny the influence of concupiscence. In itself, concupiscence is simply the tendency of the human appetite to seek its own good, its own delight. (*concupiscentia est appetitus delectabilis* – I II, 30, 1) Before the Fall this appetite was kept in check by the preternatural gift of integrity. Under the control of this gift

the senses were subject to reason, and reason itself was docile to the leadings of grace. By the Fall this gift was lost with the others, and the principle of control being gone, concupiscence began to seek its own good immoderately and became, without any intrinsic change, “an inclination of our corrupt nature to seek inordinately after corruptible goods.” (I II, 84, 1)

In other words, after the Fall we became like a chicken that, having lost its head, jumps about in wildly erratic movements; the organs still have life, but the center of control and coordination is now gone. Or again, man with the gift of integrity may be likened to a harmonious society in which each person performs his own proper functions under the authority of a superior. And man after the Fall may be likened to an anarchic society, where there is no authority or no principle of harmony, each person seeking his own good at the expense of the others. So now, our senses and faculties remaining intrinsically the same as before original sin, they nevertheless tend to seek each its private good instead of their common and highest good; lacking a principle of order and inter-subordination, the senses shake off the control of reason, and reason itself rebels against the direction of grace.

You see then how this explanation, on the one hand, safeguards the substantial goodness of nature, while, on the other, it affirms the existence of concupiscence as a force powerfully pushing men towards evil. In other words, it shows at once that nature is good and yet, in its present state requires a purification. The same St. Thomas who says that grace perfects nature and does not destroy it, also says:

“We ought not to love the infection of guilt and the corruption in our bodies that comes of punishment, but rather charity should impel us to desire their removal.” (II II, 25, 5)

And therefore Father Garrigou-Lagrange, says, in summary of all this:

“St. Thomas maintains the infinite elevation of grace above our nature and also the harmony between the two. But he adds that this harmony only appears *after a profound* purification of nature, by mortification, and the cross, as the lives of the saints show.” (*op. cit.*, page 60)



Some Particular Cases

The above principles will reveal the fallacy in my critic's arguments, the baselessness of his charge, the falsity of his own position. With them before us I can proceed to consider several of his Particular Comments.

Concerning a statement of mine (*Applied Christianity*, page 15 [p. 28 our edition]), my critic writes:

“The statement of the author that ‘all the activity in our unregenerate human nature, until it is mortified and purified by grace, is infected more or less with concupiscence’ is *dangerously like* [!] the proposition of Baius, condemned by Pope Pius V (D. B. 1027): ‘*Liberum arbitrium, sine gratiae Dei adjurio, nonnisi ad peccatum valet.*’” We have already examined the falsity and shallowness of that charge of Jansenism. I wish now merely to direct the reader's attention to the fact that my critic's statement is an excellent illustration of precisely what I have been saying. It is a denial of concupiscence as a moral force in the lives of Christians. At any rate it denies the existence of concupiscence until this reaches the stature of sin. My critic is thus like a doctor who cannot recognize the presence of disease until his patient is laid out in a coffin. And, having a “sin mentality,” he naturally thinks also that when I am speaking about concupiscence I am talking about sin; that I consider concupiscence itself a mortal sin.

On the contrary, I believe, with the Council of Trent, that concupiscence is not a sin at all; furthermore, I affirm with the same high authority, that it remains nevertheless even in the baptized, that it leads to sin, that it cannot indeed hurt those who do not consent to it, but that even the just cannot overcome it perfectly in this life, it being left in them to struggle against. (D. B. 792, 833)

My statement is no more *dangerously like* the condemned Jansenistic propositions (which hold that concupiscence is sinful and corrupts nature) than the words of the great Apostle: “For I know that there dwelleth not in me, that is to say, in my flesh, that which is good.” (Rom. 7, 18) Or than this!

“To be converted to his ultimate beatitude is difficult for man for two reasons: it is difficult both because it is above nature and because there is in him an impediment arising from the corruption of his body and the infection of sin. But for the angels it is difficult only because it is above their nature.” (I, 62, 2 and 2)

In *Applied Christianity* it is stated that: “Even good (i.e., unselfish) natural motives are impossible to imperfect souls.”

My critic comments: “The statement that imperfect souls cannot have naturally good motives leads necessarily to the conclusion that all such persons do out of a natural motive is *sinful*. [Italics mine.] Cf., proposition of Baius condemned by Pope Pius V: *Omnia opera infidelium sunt peccata?*”

My critic, whose diligence is truly admirable, has hunted this statement out of an old set of mimeographed sheets, from which the book was made. He notes, in a significant parenthesis, that it is not in the revised edition. However, while I do not remember why the statement was dropped, it was not because of any uneasiness about its orthodoxy. I am ready to assert its truth today as when first I wrote it.

The reason why the Jansenists hold that all the works of infidels are sinful is because they considered human nature radically corrupted by concupiscence. But I believe that concupiscence, not a sin, yet prone to lead man astray, may enter even into good works, without corrupting them essentially but nevertheless diminishing their merit. Thus my statement simply means that the good natural motives of imperfect men will be – not necessarily, but *de facto* – mixed with some selfishness, although this selfishness may be only an imperfection not even reaching the proportions of venial sin. I do not state that natural motives are *necessarily* selfish. What I say is that in imperfect men – i.e., those who allow some rein to concupiscence – selfishness will, as a result, enter into their motive. By purifying the motive – that is the doctrine of the book – the selfishness and imperfection disappear; so that, contrary to the Jansenists, I believe that there can be and are, but with a little moral effort, pure natural motives.⁶

Lehmkuhl (*Theol. Mor.*, Third Ed., page 34) gives two examples that will illustrate the point. If a man gives an alms, moved to do so by mercy but also by some vainglory, Lemhkuhl says that the action is good and meritorious, although its merit, because of the vainglory, is much diminished (*multum diminuitur*). Again, if a girl goes to the sacraments moved by vanity, but also receiving the sacraments rightly, that action is also meritorious, but its merit is weakened and diminished (*multum diminuta et debilita*). These are the kind of actions I had in mind when making the above statement.

6. In this connection the reader might well read again the citation (Chapter II, Section 1) from de Caussade on purifying motives.

This statement, far from leading *necessarily* to the Jansenistic conclusion, could not even suggest such a thing, except to one with the two-category sin mentality. Similar statements are quite usual in spiritual writers. Thus, Father Augustine Baker writes:

“But as for other actions, for which they have received no light at all in prayer, those they perform with the help of their natural reason, or at best by the general habitual light of grace only, by virtue of which they avoid grosser sinful defects; but yet their actions are stained with great impurity of intention, and a mixture of natural and sensual interests. The reason is, because imagination and passion being very much predominant in them, do push then hastily to perform their actions without sufficient reflection and consulting their internal teacher; and, if they do endeavor to adjoin a good intention, it comes late after the action is either begun or resolved upon for other motives; so that the divine love is but an accessory and attendant, and not the prime mover or principle of the action.” (*Holy Wisdom*, page 111)



Sometimes my critic does not specify what my “errors” are. He simply makes a general gesture in the direction of the book and states a criticism. One such entry in the endless list (I take it because it pertains to the present subject) is as follows:

“page 10, Errors 2 and 4. [this refers to the General Comments] If we do not commit mortal sin, we shall not be prevented from entering into heaven, however much pleasure we may have in creatures.”

The critic here does not see that he contradicts himself. If a man does not limit his pleasure-seeking, he will very soon commit sin, at least venial sin, and eventually mortal sin. Because the critic has no practical belief in concupiscence he cannot see this. Pleasure, in his mind, is quite distinct from sin. He does not know that “he who lives according to the flesh shall die...” (Rom. 8, 13)

Yet, as we have already observed, not only does sin have a relation to pleasure in creatures, but the turning to creatures is an element in sin, the material element, the material cause of sin. Venial sin is committed by taking too much pleasure in creatures. St. Thomas says that venial sin is an abuse in the order of means: one takes excessive pleasure in creatures

without giving up God as a last end, as when a sick man takes some delicacy forbidden by his diet, but without giving up his desire for health. (II II, 24, 10) Mortal sin consists in taking creatures, and pleasure in creatures, as a final end, thus completely rejecting God as one's last end. Even that love of creatures which is only an habitual attachment or imperfection retards the soul:

“But some habits of voluntary imperfections, which are never completely conquered, prevent not only the attainment of divine union, but also progress in perfection.” (St. John of the Cross, *op. cit.*, I, 11)

St. Thomas briefly explains this as follows:

“Man is placed midway between the goods of this world and spiritual goods, in the latter of which his eternal happiness is found. And this is in such wise that the more he is attached to one set of these goods, the further does he remove himself from the other, and *vice versa*. Whoever is completely attached to the goods of this world, to the extent that he makes them his end, having them as the regulator and norm of his works, is totally excluded from spiritual goods.” (I II, 108,4)

To go as far as you wish in seeking pleasure (“however much pleasure we may have in creatures”) and at the same time to attempt to avoid mortal sin, is to try to walk off in opposite directions at once. Most of us can't do it. “She that liveth in pleasures is dead while she is living.” (I Tim. 5, 6)



This brings me to the next (and last) Particular Comment that I will consider in this part. Not believing in concupiscence, i.e., that it inclines to sin; not seeing that it is through the love of creatures that concupiscence works, my critic cannot believe that there could be such a thing as progressive deterioration, or retrogression, in a soul. His mental pigeon-holes are fixed: moral goodness, venial sin, mortal sin; and there is no relation between them; to avoid mortal sin is merely a matter of keeping a mechanical rule. Hence he writes concerning my “involved discussion of imperfections” (*Applied Christianity*, page 43 [Cf. Part I, Chap. VI-I: The Doctrine of Imperfect Actions, p. 45 our edition]):

“This entire doctrine of imperfections is misleading. Certainly the vast majority of even very good Catholics could do better

than they are doing spiritually. For example, persons who receive Holy Communion every week could receive it every day. According to the author, such persons are on the way to lose the state of grace. The statement that imperfections, even though not sinful, displease and insult God, is certainly not correct.”

Now my discussion of imperfections is, in point of fact, admirably lucid and clear, and neither misleading nor involved. I have no hesitation in saying this: for its matter is taken entirely from *Christian Perfection and Contemplation* by Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., one of the most distinguished living theologians. All that I do is to schematize the matter, develop some of his illustrations and add a few others (especially from Alphonsus Rodriguez, who treats this matter effectively in his *Practice of Perfection and Christian Virtues*, First Treatise, Chap. 6). My critic evidently did not advert to the fact that some of the matter which he objects to is a direct quotation from Father Garrigou-Lagrange. Moreover, the example of imperfection cited by my critic is not to be found in *Applied Christianity*; nor does it represent my mind concerning imperfections, nor that of the great Dominican.

My critic says that it is incorrect to hold that imperfections, even though not sinful, displease and insult God. He does not reveal which school of theology holds the alternative; i.e., that imperfections please and glorify God. But the theologian whom I was following in this matter says that imperfections, though to an extent meritorious, nevertheless

“even show a deficit, in this sense that a soul ought always to progress instead of remaining stationary; just as a child ought always to grow in order not to be stunted.” (*Christian Perfection*, etc., page 189)



However, as other criticisms also show, it is something deeper than this that makes the critic dissatisfied with my discussion of imperfections: it is the teaching that imperfections prepare the way for a fall from grace, that they lead to venial sin, which in turn disposes the soul for mortal sin. Not believing that the spiritual life, being a life, is a *growth*, else it is a retrogression; not believing that retrogression can go forward (i.e., in disease) just as growth, on the other hand, brings about an increase, my critic does not admit any mutual influence between the various classes of moral disorder – imperfection, venial sin, mortal sin. He cannot perceive that a sore may grow into cancer: to him the classifi-

cation is fixed and final. For this reason he accuses me of a preposterous error!

“It *seems* to be *implied* [!] that many venial sins will make a mortal sin. This is false. Sometimes the matter of venial sins will unite to make grave matter; but the sins do not accumulate in this way.”

There is, however, no question here of venial sins accumulating into mortal sins. It is a question of whether minor faults and relaxations can lead to graver falls.

The Scriptures themselves suggest the possibility: “He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little.” (*Ecclus.* 19, 1)

The doctrine to which my critic objects in *Applied Christianity* is a direct quotation from Father Garrigou-Lagrange:

“...These acts [i.e., imperfections] dispose us to positive retrogression, for by reason of their weakness they permit the rebirth of disordered inclinations, which lead to venial sin, and may end by leading us to spiritual death.” (*Op. cit.*, page 189)

This is no mere personal theory: St. Thomas, although of course denying that minor faults can *directly* destroy charity, shows that they can indirectly undermine it. He says:

“The consequence is that charity can in no way be directly diminished [by minor faults]. Indirectly, however, there can be said to be a diminution of charity through a disposition leading towards its dissolution, a disposition that may come about either through venial sin or a cessation from the works of charity.” (I II, 24 10)

Even more directly:

“Nothing prevents a mortal sin from arising out of a venial sin, since venial sin is a certain disposition towards mortal sin, *Nihil autem prohibet ex peccato veniali oriri mortale, cum veniale sit dispositio ad mortale.*” (II II, 105, 1)

And St. Alphonsus:

“A bad habit is an ulcer which infects the soul; and it diminishes her strength to avoid light faults, so it gradually renders her unable to resist grievous temptations.” (*True Spouse of Christ*, page 104)

The same saint admirably sums up the whole doctrine in a paragraph which also includes an explanation of the cause and mode of such gradual moral deterioration:

“Now what are the effects of venial sins? They diminish the lights, the helps, and the protection of God; so that the soul, being darkened, weak and dry, will lose all affection for the things of God, will become *attached to the things of the world*, and, thus exposed to great danger of renouncing the grace of God for the sake of earthly goods.” (*Ibid.*, page 105)



And so we conclude our inquiry into the charge that *Applied Christianity* exaggerates original sin. To one who ignores it altogether and has no consciousness whatsoever of its effects (short of mortal sin), any emphasis appears exaggerated, as, to a sick man, the lightest touch seems heavy. Pope Pius XI offers an explanation of this attitude:

“All men are obliged to make reparation since, according to the teachings of our Holy Faith, our souls have been disfigured, as a result of the pitiable fall of Adam, by original sin; we are subject also to our passions and corrupted in a truly sad way, and have thus made ourselves worthy of eternal damnation. It is true that the proud philosophers of this world deny the above truth, *resurrecting in its place the ancient heresy of Pelagius* which conceded to human nature a certain inborn goodness which, by our own powers, raises us up to ever higher levels of perfection. These false theories, born of human pride, have been condemned by the Apostle who admonishes us that we are ‘by nature children of wrath’ (Eph. 2. 3).” (*Miserentissimus Redemptor*)

At times it is possible, as is evident, to deceive even the elect: and the modern spirit of Pelagianism, mentioned here by the Pope, will go far to explain (a supplementary explanation will be given in Chapter IV) why my critic has no fears about the love of creatures, why he is unconcerned about any attachment short of those which are ethically inordinate, why he makes no allowance for the power of concupiscence, and, as a consequence of all this, why he is so excessively moderate in his doctrine of mortification.

“Talk to him about ‘moderation in all things’ said the cunning

Screwtape to his nephew. If you can once got him to the point of thinking that ‘religion is all very well up to a point,’ you can feel quite happy about his soul. A moderated religion is as good for us as no religion at all – and more amusing.” (*Screwtape Letters*, page 51)



General Conclusion to Chapter II

Having viewed the evidence, it is somewhat difficult to accept my critic’s summary of the case. What all the charges add up to in his mind is indicated both at the beginning and at the end of his criticisms: At the beginning he sets the theme:

“Although much that is said in these notes is perfectly orthodox and inspiring [with, of course, the one harmless exception of a Jansenistic tendency], there are nevertheless certain ideas and statements which are not in accord with the accepted theological and ascetical teachings of the Catholic Church.”

At the end he summarizes, in the same vein:

“It seems strange that a work which purposes to apply Christianity to our lives has so little to say about such essentially Catholic means of sanctification as Holy Communion, assistance at Mass, devotion to the Blessed Virgin.”

The explanation, if my critic really wants it, is right under his nose: the division of labor. Some professional theologians have covered the whole field of theology in their writings. Others – both professional theologians – have specialized in a particular field. But is it to be concluded of these latter, because they treat of one subject, and ignore others, that they attribute no importance to anything beyond what they write about?

Spiritual and devotional writers, in particular, put aside technical theology, especially dogmatic theology – or rather they use it simply as a quarry to serve their more practical purposes. Out of dozens of examples, I will select only two. In the *Introduction to the Devout Life* by St. Francis de Sales, there are only three short chapters on the Sacraments, and these treat, not of the dogma of the sacraments, but of the subjective dispositions necessary for their fruitful reception. The *Treatise on the Love of God*, by the same author, contains no treatment of any of

the “essentially Catholic” subjects listed by my critic. Yet on the basis of these two works, together with some minor writings (of which the same observations are true), he has been made a Doctor of the Church. So has St. John of the Cross; and there is *not a line* in all his collected works on the doctrines required by my critic.

Yet the critic on the basis of his findings concludes:

“Apart from certain passages, it [*Applied Christianity*] might have been written by a fervent Methodist or Presbyterian.”

I wonder if my critic would include the two Doctors just mentioned in this classification also! Whatever his opinion, I am only too happy to find myself, in this and in the many other matters that have now come under the reader’s attention, in such very excellent company.



Jansenism is a dead heresy. My critic is fighting ghosts. It expressed something in the spirit of the Seventeenth and early Eighteenth Centuries. But that spirit has now practically disappeared from the world and a new one has taken its place, i.e., the spirit of pagan naturalism, quite different from Jansenistic naturalism. It denies the supernatural and it degrades the spiritual; its ethics, however, instead of following the hard rule of Epictetus, is the more pleasant one of Epicurus: “Eat, drink, make good cheer.” (Luke 12, 19) It is this spirit against which we must today be on our guard. It is this spirit that my critic, in his eminent position, should be attacking; yet, in fact, it is this spirit which his criticisms reflect.

For the spirit of the world has entered in among Catholics, the cockle is growing with the wheat – and to such an extent that Pope Pius XI could write (*Ubi Arcano Dei*):

“The habit of life which can be called really Christian has in a great measure disappeared.”

Catholics cannot deny the supernatural, but they may ignore it. They cannot deny the spiritual, but they can fail to “seek the things that are above,” and rather “mind the things that are on the earth.” (Col. 3, 1) And that is what happens when naturalism enters among the faithful. It exalts nature, scrupulously exacts all of nature’s rights. At the same time it gives lip service to the supernatural, while ignoring the latter’s practical implications and exigencies. It keeps the ethics of “Eat, drink, make good cheer,” only it adds this modification: do this with moderation, without

falling into gross sin – a modification which at least the more enlightened pagans also observe. It then goes on to seek a theological sanction for itself, on the one hand, by exaggerating the claims of nature, and, on the other, by diluting, diminishing, and even distorting (as we have seen) the precepts of the Gospel. All of this results in a peculiarly modern movement of piety, which may aptly be called “the school of pious naturalism,” and, which Father Faber, at an earlier stage of its development, described with admirable accuracy and succinctness as follows:

“A supernatural formalism outside, with natural principles of action inside, and a thoroughly natural system or rather quackery of spiritual direction to keep things safe and respectable.”
(*Spiritual Conferences*, page 199)

My critic is rather a philosopher than a theologian, rather an Aristotelian than an interpreter of Christ, rather a friend of nature than of grace. His views seem *dangerously like* those of pious naturalism. He began by telling me that I do “not correctly present the relation between the natural and the supernatural.” I end, having, I think, satisfactorily proved that it is he who completely misunderstands this relation.

“To suppose that grace adapts itself to nature is to suppose the opposite of the truth. Nature is subordinate to grace, not grace to nature. . . . Grace is a law unto itself and its workings are the proper object not of reason but of divine faith. Unless this is realized, the way of the Cross and the self-renunciation of the saints quite naturally remain inexplicable. Moreover, we are in danger of allowing our practical conduct to be governed by Aristotelian rather than evangelical principles. St. Thomas had too clear an insight into the meaning of Christian perfection ever to make such a mistake; but the same cannot be said of all those who have appealed to him for support.” (Dom Aelred Graham, *The Love of God*, page 112-13)

Chapter III

Odds and Ends

In this section I will consider individually a number of the one hundred and twenty-eight Particular Comments. Not all of them however. For one thing this would be almost an impossibility – at any rate an endlessly tedious task. Nor is it necessary. In circulating these criticisms, only a selection (thirty of them) has been mimeographed. Others have reached me in a typed copy; so that even the critic himself, or the distributors, apparently do not think it worth while to reproduce them all. I will consider all of the objections given in the mimeographed section – although not returning to ones that I have already answered, or taking up again such as merely illustrate the General Comments – since these are presumably the ones which the critic himself thinks most important and damaging.

Nor is it hard to find a principle of selection in dealing with the remainder, i.e., those in the typed copy. By far the greater number are intended to be illustrations of the five General Comments. But having, I think, decently interred the parents, it is needless to harry these orphans.

Many others eliminate themselves, by the fact that no definite place or words are given, no specific “error” indicated. Thus:

“page 17. Error 4.” Where does the author find these interpretations of Scripture? “page 74. It is hard to see what the author means here.”

Confessedly it is difficult to meet such “criticisms” as these. To attempt it, I fancy, would be like wrestling with a cloud.

I will therefore take up only such as make a definite charge, distinct from the others considered.

– 1 –

“*Applied Christianity* (page 10 [p. 12 our edition]): “In every man there is a twofold principle of activity. The one is his human nature. The other principle is supernatural. It does not belong to man at all but is given to him by God, out of God’s infinite mercy. It comes in divine grace.”

The critic: “The implication [!] is that there are two distinct principles of activity. The truth is that human nature is one principle of activity, which by its own powers can perform natural

acts, by the power of grace can perform supernatural acts.”

Answer: The exact manner in which grace is united to human nature is a technical question which is surely not within the scope of a popular book of devotion. Nothing is implied; the question is simply passed over. I am perfectly well aware of the unity of human personality; but I also believe that it is capable of great variety in conduct. Like my critic’s other “implications,” this one implicates many persons rather high up in ecclesiastical circles:

“In this mystical temple [of the soul] there are also three courts [i.e., as in the Jewish temple], which are three different degrees of reason; in the first we reason according to the experience of sense, in the second according to human sciences, in the third according to faith...” (St. Francis de Sales, *Love of God*, I, 12)

These are the three levels of possible activity given by *Applied Christianity*.

– 2 –

Applied Christianity (page 11 [p. 13 our edition]): “But no action, no matter how grand or good, which does not proceed from charity, can be considered either as supernatural or meritorious; therefore, it is useless for my supernatural destiny.”

The critic: “It is incorrect to say that no action can be considered supernatural unless it proceeds from charity. The acts by which a sinner disposes himself for grace – e.g., faith, hope, attrition – are supernatural; but not meritorious *de condigno*.”

Answer: This is a technicality. I have no notion of denying the supernatural quality of those merely salutary acts – the acts preparing for justification – of which the critic speaks. But I am not concerned with them here and so pass them over. Elsewhere (Part III, Chap. VI) I affirm both the existence and the supernatural quality of such acts. In this place I am speaking, not of those preparing for justification, but of those who have already been justified, i.e., baptized Christians; and I am trying to explain the conditions necessary for them to merit eternal happiness. The critic himself admits that the preparatory acts of which he speaks are not meritorious *de condigno*, i.e., cannot merit grace or glory. And that is precisely what is said in the sentence under consideration, i.e., that unless acts proceed from charity “they are useless for my supernatural destiny” or end.

The truth that I am here trying to enforce is that actions, to be supernatural, must proceed from a supernatural principle. Of course, in making any generalization, allowance is always to be made for possible exceptions. Yet the case which the critic brings up is not even an exception: it illustrates my principle rather than confutes it. For these preparatory acts, although not proceeding from charity, are impelled by divine (actual) grace; otherwise they could not be supernatural at all. Add to this the fact that these merely salutary acts are not yet in the most complete and perfect sense supernatural:

“Actual grace invariably tends either to produce habitual or sanctifying grace, or to preserve and increase it where it already exists. It follows that, *being merely a means to an end*, actual grace is inferior to sanctifying grace which is that end itself.”
(Pohle, *Grace, Actual and Habitual*, pp. 14-15)

Should the critic wish to push the matter beyond this technical point, and attack also the principle which is defended in the book, he will obviously be opposing a Catholic doctrine, i.e., the necessity of a supernatural state for merit.

This petty fault-finding gives me occasion to deal at once with another large group of objections which are concerned with similar technicalities. In a work of devotion it does not seem either necessary or useful to go into such technical theological distinctions as the present one between merely salutary acts and meritorious acts, especially as the distinction has no relevance to the matter in hand. Already *Applied Christianity* is overweighted with technical theology; and all of my critic's objections grieve me less than one which I have heard from many devout but simple souls, i.e., that the book is too technical for their understanding. Here, also, I can claim as authority and model – alas, not closely enough followed in this matter – St. Francis de Sales, whose books, unique in the history of spirituality, are a veritable compendium of theology, organized for the practical purpose of guiding souls to perfection, true to all the formal principles of theology, yet without one technical word or one speculative theological discussion – in a word, containing the truths of dogma as music contains the principles of mathematics.

– 3 –

Applied Christianity (page 18 [p. 20 our edition]): “*By the mere avoidance of sin we do not live a supernatural life. If I avoid sin, and do nothing more, I am still on the natural level of life – I am*

a pagan, a good pagan since I avoid sin, but a pagan nevertheless.”

The critic: “The avoidance of sin for any length of time involves the necessity of placing of good acts.”

Answer: The avoidance of sin *at all* involves the placing of good acts; in fact, the avoidance of sin in itself is a good act. Certainly I do not deny that: what I say is something quite different: that avoidance of sin, of itself, involves only the placing of good *natural* acts. There is no question of their goodness: that is why I describe the man who performs such acts as a *good* pagan.

But the point is that the most exalted natural actions, considered in themselves, are infinitely below the supernatural standard set by Our Lord – for example, in the Eight Beatitudes.

“Not to steal, not to lie, not to commit impurity, to pray to God, not to swear in vain, to love and honor one’s father, not to kill, – is to live according to man’s natural reason: but to forsake all our goods, to love poverty, to call her and to consider her a most delightful mistress, to repute reproaches, contempts, objections, persecutions, martyrdoms, as felicities and beatitudes, to contain one’s self within the terms of a most absolute chastity, and *in fine* to live, amidst the world and in this mortal life, contrary to all the opinions and maxims of the world, and against the current of the river of this life, by habitual resignations, renunciations, and abnegations of ourselves; – this is not to live in ourselves, but out of and above ourselves; and because no one is able to go out of himself in this manner above himself unless the eternal *Father draw him*, hence it is that this kind of life is a perpetual rapture and a continual ecstasy of action and operation.” St. Francis de Sales, *Love of God*, VII, 6)

In calling the supernatural life – here so clearly distinguished from the merely natural – a “continual ecstasy of action and operation,” the saint does not mean that it is a *gratia gratis data*, a *charismata* (as raptures and ecstasies are usually understood); this meaning is precluded by the words “action and operation,” since mystical ecstasies and raptures are marked precisely by a cessation of action and operation. What the saint means is that the supernatural life is itself so sublime, so high above the more natural condition of our lives, that it is in itself – without any *charismata* – a continual rapture and ecstasy. And this fact is brought out by a sentence in the following chapter of the same book:

“Blessed are they who live a superhuman and ecstatic life, raised above themselves, though they may not be ravished above themselves in prayer. There are many saints in heaven who were never in ecstasy or rapture *of contemplation*. For how many martyrs and great saints do we see in history never to have had other privileges in prayer than that of devotion or fervor. *But there never was a saint who had not the ecstasy and rapture of life and operation; overcoming himself and his natural inclinations.*”

All this, of course, means nothing to the devotees of pious naturalism. They practice the natural virtues, keep the natural law. There is a probable opinion, they say, that all the good natural works of one in the state of grace are meritorious. And the Gospel – what happens to it? To the Eight Beatitudes? To the Sermon on the Mount? Well, you see, they are *only* counsels; they do not bind us strictly; we do not have to obey then *under pain of sin*; so that, of course, if we offend against the counsels of the Gospel, there is *no sin* in it. Such are workings of the “sin mentality.”

And then they take out their prize argument, their capital proof. Speaking of the precepts of Jesus, they say:

“When He was asked: ‘What good shall I do that I may have life everlasting?’ He declared simply: ‘If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.’ And when requested to specify, He simply cited (Matt. 19, 18 s2) the ordinary precepts of the Decalogue.”

The conclusion to be drawn from this exegesis (which is a direct quotation, although not from my present critic) is obvious: as long as we observe the Mosaic code – which, except for the third commandment, is the natural law, imposed by reason – all will be well, nothing more is required, and anyone who asks any more of us is stricter than Christ Himself, is therefore a fanatic, a rigorist, an extremist.

This argument – nay, this proof – is advanced triumphantly and with finality. It is impregnable.

It is a house of cards – as absurd a defense, against the supernatural as is a mud hut against a modern cannon.

St. Thomas Aquinas provides the cannon – medieval but unsurpassed in power. He has quite a different exegesis for that text dealing with the Rich Young Man. On those words of Our Lord, “Keep the commandments,” he says:

“It is to be observed that Our Lord did not say: If you wish to enter into life, keep one commandment, but rather, ‘Keep all the commandments.’ And among these is certainly contained the commandment concerning the love of God and of our neighbors (*inter quæ etiam continetur mandatum de dilectione Dei et proximi*).” (I II, 100, 10 ad 1)

In other words, the word *commandment* includes, besides the Mosaic Law, the central precept of the Gospel, the “first and greatest commandment” of love. And by what authority, indeed, does pious naturalism exclude the greatest of all commandments, that of supernatural love, from their definition of commandment? By no authority, but as result of the incurable obtuseness of its “sin mentality.”

As a matter of fact, in the account of the incident as given by St. Matthew, the commandment of love is explicitly mentioned. After enumerating the commandments of the Mosaic code, Jesus adds: ‘Love thy neighbor as thyself.’” (Matt. 19, 19) This is the “new commandment” of Jesus (John 13, 34), the one which St. Paul calls the “fulfillment of the law,” and which Jesus elsewhere calls “the law and the prophets.” (Rom. 13, 10; Matt. 7, 12)

According to St. Thomas, again, Jesus explicitly included the precept of loving God among the conditions which He demanded for entering into life. According to the holy doctor, the words “Follow me,” addressed peremptorily and without any condition, and being an invitation to divine love, are nothing other than the precept of love. Accordingly, in the sentence, “If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast and give to the poor . . . and come follow me” – in this text, according to St. Thomas, two elements are to be distinguished: a counsel – “sell what thou hast”; and a precept, none other than the great precept of love – “Follow me!” (II II, 184, 3)

Furthermore, as the saint teaches (*Ibid.*), love, or charity, *is identical with Christian perfection*: in imposing on the young man the precept of love, he was at the same time imposing on him the *precept* of perfection.⁷ For, according to him, perfection is a precept – *not* a counsel – and even the higher degrees of perfection fall under the precept, at least as an end towards which we should constantly strive.

Now we have the whole story. The irrefutable argument falls apart. The words of Jesus do not only impose on us the Mosaic law. They

7. The counsels, poverty, chastity, obedience, are then simply higher, optional ways to realize, as an *end*, a perfection that is *preceptive* for all.

impose on us the law of love: they impose on us – on all of us – the duty of striving for perfection, and for the highest perfection.

Such is the doctrine of St. Thomas. It tells a story different from that of devout naturalism. But the clients of this school are so busy exercising their natural virtues at the movies and the baseball park that they have no time to read *him*.

– 4 –

Applied Christianity (page. 19 [p. 22 our edition]): “Accordingly, hatred for the world, and not mere avoidance of sin, belongs to the very essence of Christianity. It is only by raising ourselves above the whole natural order that we become Christians. To do this we must love God with our whole heart, whole soul, whole mind, whole strength. This means that we must withdraw all our love from the things of the world, giving it all to God.”

The critic: “When we love God with our whole heart we do not withdraw our love from creatures. We supernaturalize this natural love, in so far as it is good.”

Answer: “Man is placed midway between the things of this world and spiritual goods, in the latter of which his eternal happiness consists, in such wise that the more he is attached to one set of these goods the more he removes himself from the other, and *vice versa*.” (St. Thomas I 11, 108, 4, 6)

– 5 –

Applied Christianity (page 21 [p. 23 our edition]): “All the commandments are useless for the supernatural order if we fail to obey the commandment of charity. And all the virtues are powerless to place us on the supernatural if we have not charity.”

The critic: “We can obey the commandments from other supernatural motives beside charity, and thus perform supernatural (though not meritorious) acts. Some of the author’s ideas resemble [!] the proposition of Baius condemned by Pope Pius V: ‘*Non est vera legis obedientia quæ sit sine caritate*’ (Denz. 1016), and also the proposition of Quesnel, condemned by Pope Clement XI: ‘*Deus non coronat nisi caritatem qui currit ex alio impulso et ex alio motivo, in vanum currit.*’” (Denz. 1405 – cf., 1403, 1404, 1406)

Answer: This objection has already been answered; it involves the

same point as No. 2. The question here is not concerning salutary acts but meritorious acts; and charity is the principle of merit.

“It is in this sense that the apostle speaks (I Cor. 13, 2): ‘If I do not have charity, I am nothing... it profits me nothing.’ For to say that the works of the virtues are of no profit without charity is the same as to say that they are not meritorious of eternal life unless they proceed from charity: that is, merit is primarily to be attributed to charity, and to the other virtues only in so far as they receive their ultimate perfection from charity... And therefore the Apostle confirms this teaching, showing that charity commands (*imperare*) the acts of the other virtues, of which he enumerates some examples: ‘Charity is patient, is kind, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.’” (Billot: *De Gratia*, page 272-273)

Obviously my statement has no more resemblance to Jansenism than does this one of Billot’s. And this brings us face to face with a very significant fact. My critic interprets these *Jansenistic propositions* wrongly; he does not give the true reason why they were condemned.

When examining the charge of Jansenism in Chapter I, we saw that the charge dissolved itself as soon as the true meaning of the condemned Jansenistic propositions was analyzed and understood. My critic did not make such an analysis – he simply enumerated the propositions. This present criticism suggests at least one reason why he did not do so: he himself does not understand very clearly the reason for the condemnation of those propositions. Neither of the condemned propositions quoted here was condemned, as the critic would give us to understand, because it denied the existence of salutary acts. Nor were any of the other propositions condemned for that reason. All were condemned for one reason, as explained in Chapter I, i.e., that they either asserted or implied that nature is evil, and that the actions proceeding from it are therefore sinful: in other words they allowed no alternative to charity except sin; and their propositions were not condemned because of any over-emphasis on charity (although their conception of charity was false, also,) but because they held that every thing except charity was sinful.

As a matter of fact, their attitude towards (what we would call) salutary acts was extraordinarily liberal: their error was in quite the opposite direction from that indicated by my critic. They denied the necessity of sanctifying grace and of habitual charity, i.e., of a supernatural state. For them charity meant all obedience to the divine law, not a theological virtue; and they held that men could be justified and merit

eternal happiness by such “charity”, i.e., by what we would call salutary acts, even before baptism, or, in the case of the baptized who had fallen into sin, before receiving the Sacrament of Penance. This teaching was condemned.

Nothing could more perfectly reveal the utter worthlessness of my critic’s charges than this objection.

– 6 –

Applied Christianity: “It is impossible to distinguish good from selfish motives in practice; and it is therefore necessary to get rid of them all.”

The critic: “It is impossible to distinguish certain good natural motives from selfish motives. But there are certainly some natural motives that are good and can be supernaturalized, such as the love of a mother for her child. Would the author say that we must teach Catholic mothers that they must stifle their natural love for their children?”

Answer: In answering this, I will at once answer a half dozen or so other criticisms which deal with this same subject, i.e., conjugal love and the natural affection among members of a family. I have treated of conjugal love in the General Comments. To this criticism, for its better understanding, I add another remark of the critic from a different Particular Comment, which will show the drift of his thoughts:

“Not all natural affection is *sinful*. The good mother’s love for her child is natural, but certainly not *sinful*, and it can be directed to God as the ultimate end by charity.”

In answer, let it be said that the author would not urge Catholic mothers to stifle their natural love for their children. The word *stifle* is the critic’s, not mine. And I speak of getting rid of natural motive, not of natural love between child and mother. What I would have the Catholic mother (and child) do is to supernaturalize their love. This does not destroy the natural love physically, since this, coming from the human will, would remain human and natural; but it would destroy it morally, i.e., would change its motivation. So that now the mother would love her child as a trust from God, and not merely because the child is pretty or talented or companionable.

Moreover, there is absolutely no question in *Applied Christianity* of such love being sinful. The critic says, “that not all natural affection is sinful.” As far as I am concerned, *no* natural affection is sinful. I do not

call *sinful* even such trivial motives as those mentioned (i.e., to love the child because it is pretty). The introduction of the sin *motif* (again) is my critic's idea; it comes from his two-category sin mentality. *Applied Christianity* nowhere suggests that such an affection is evil; it does urge that, since it is at best natural, a higher motivation is both more proper and more meritorious for men with a supernatural destiny. The least supernatural motive is infinitely higher than the most exalted natural motive.

As a matter of fact, all our affections ought to be supernaturalized. Charity is defined thus (Sabetti-Barett, #165):

“Charity is a virtue by which we love God as the highest good and our neighbor *on account of God*.”

In other words charity urges that all our friendships be animated by a supernatural motive – “on account of God, *propter Deum*.” Are our parents, wives, husbands, children, alone to stay outside the influence of charity – they alone to be loved with a merely natural love, as among the pagans? On the contrary, theologians, explaining that charity must be well-ordered, show that charity, i.e., supernatural love, ought *first* to be directed to the members of our own family.

Protagonists of the school of pious naturalism, not the teachings of *Applied Christianity*, are responsible for the falsehood that to supernaturalize a love is to diminish or destroy it. How they fear the supernatural! As a matter of fact, charity ennobles, elevates, completes, and perfects human love, at the same time ridding it of pettiness, selfishness, and sensuality. Jesus and Mary loved one another with a purely supernatural love, i.e., supernatural in its motivation. And their love for one another should certainly be the model of ours. Their love was not less fervent for being supernatural, but more fervent; not less satisfying, but more satisfying; not less intense, but more intense. Often supernatural love must inflict sorrow on nature, deny nature its desires: and the willingness to do this is the very criterion that a love is truly supernatural. Thus Jesus did not spare His human mother sorrow; nor did she require of Him human consolation or comfort. For the sake of God, they both sacrificed the merely human good of their two immaculate human natures.

For us also, supernatural love must often sacrifice the natural joys of love, and always must it be detached and inwardly prepared to do so. Thus St. Bernard writes to a young man who, for love of his mother, hesitated to enter religion:

“Bound by affection to your mother, you cannot as yet abandon the world which you have learned long since to despise.

What advice shall I offer you? To forsake your mother? But that appears cruel. To remain with her? But that would not be expedient even for her – that she should become the cause of her son's perdition. To serve at once both Christ and the world? 'But no man can serve two masters' (Matt. 6, 24). Your mother's will, in this matter, being contrary to your salvation, is contrary to her own. *If you love her truly, you will abandon her for her own sake*, lest if you abandon Christ to remain with her you be the cause of her ruin. For how can she escape destruction if allowed to destroy him to whom she has given birth? I have said this out of condescension to your natural affection. But it is a 'faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance' (I Tim. 1, 15): that although it be impious to despise one's mother for any earthly reason, it is piety itself to despise one's mother for God's sake. For He who said: 'Honor thy father and thy mother' (Matt. 15, 4), said also: 'He that loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me' (Matt. 10, 37). (Luddy: *Life and Times of St. Bernard*, page 369)

– 7 –

Applied Christianity (page 58 [p. 76 our edition]): "The sample is used merely to show what is obtainable at the factory, or the store. So with the samples of heaven; they are not put here to be enjoyed, but to give some idea of what is waiting for us in heaven."

The critic: "The goods of this world are not intended *merely* as samples. They have as their proximate end, the promotion of man's happiness in this life."

Answer: Every analogy limps, i.e., has certain limitations which must be observed in interpreting it; otherwise it would not be an analogy, but an identity. The use of the word "samples" to describe the creatures of God, is, of course, an analogy. Of samples in the proper sense of the word it is true to say that they are *merely* to show what is in the store. But the reader will observe, in the sentence under consideration, that, in applying the analogy to creatures, I drop the word *merely*; it is my critic who re-inserts it and emphasizes it.

My point is that creatures are not here merely to be enjoyed, i.e., as pagans enjoy them. I quite agree that they are here to promote man's happiness, if supernatural happiness is meant. To make men supernaturally happy is the secondary end of God in creating and elevating them;

but is not His end to have them “Eat, drink, make good cheer.”

As a matter of fact, *Applied Christianity*, through all the chapters preceding the discussion of samples, has made it clear that there is another way to use creatures supernaturally, i.e., to use them from a motive of utility, ultimately for the glory of God. Thus the book stipulates two ways of glorifying God through creatures:

- a. Using them (though not enjoying them in a pagan sense) for the glory of God.
- b. Employing them as samples to know God; and, as far as possible, renouncing them.

The second mode, although not always possible, is the higher:

“It can aptly be said: ‘The best thing to do with the best of things is to sacrifice it,’ on condition, however, that we safeguard the hierarchy of the gifts of God and of the virtues, and that we do not sacrifice something superior to what is inferior.” (Garri-gou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, page 132)

And Father Faber (*Foot of the Cross*):

“The highest use of God’s gifts is to give them back to Him again.”

– 8 –

Applied Christianity (page 82 [p. 87 our edition]): “Defectibility of will is the price that man must pay for freedom of will and it is likewise the result of his finite nature, i.e., man can commit evil only because he is not wholly good. This defectibility is removed from the souls of the just by a special help from God, so that they are confirmed in goodness.”

The critic’s comment: “To say that the just are confirmed in grace and that they have no defectibility reminds one of the doctrine condemned by Trent: “*Si quis dixerit hominem semel justificatum amplius peccare non posse* – A. S. (Denz. 833)”

Answer: The “just” that I speak of here are the just in heaven, the just *in statu termini*, who are certainly confirmed in goodness. This should be evident from the fact that in the *preceding sentence* (as given) I emphasized man’s essential defectibility on earth. And the whole paragraph from which the quotation is lifted is speaking of man’s sinfulness while he is *in statu viæ*. The sentence under consideration was intended as a

contrast between the two states.

– 9 –

Applied Christianity (page 87 [p. 91 our edition]): “In order to possess ourselves of supernatural happiness, we must give up all our natural affections, or, in other words, the supernatural rises out of the destruction and death of the natural, just as the phoenix of old was said to arise out of its own ashes.”

The critic’s comment: “See error I in General Comments.”

Answer: “The true nature of the phoenix lies in this, that by the help of the sunbeams, she annihilates her own life, to have a life more desirable and vigorous, hiding, as it were, her life under ashes... We do the same, Theotimus, if we are spiritual: for we forsake our natural life to live a more eminent life above ourselves...” (St. Francis de Sales, *Love of God*, VII, 6)

– 10 –

Although in his General Comments my critic condemns me for making no provision for recreation, that does not prevent him, in his particular comments, from condemning my provisions.

Thus when I say that detachment should be cultivated and over-anxiety avoided, even in games and recreations, he asks,

“What is wrong in taking pleasure in winning a game? That is the very essence of games of competition.”

Answer: Notice how the sin mentality springs up everywhere. “What is wrong...? Of course, there is nothing *wrong*: the difference is one between natural and supernatural behavior. But St. Francis de Sales, from whom I took the principle, will oblige me here:

“If the interest of the game is too deep, it produces over-anxiety; moreover, it is not well to attach great importance to such things as dexterity and skill in any mere games.” (*Devout Life*, III, 31)



Concerning my attempt to apply supernatural standards – instead of mere standards of natural law – to the movies – my critic says:

“It would be very difficult to get any movies, even those on the

approved list, which the author would permit Catholics to enjoy.”

Let me ask – in my critic’s language – whether, should a Catholic decide to give up movies altogether, there be *any sin* in so doing? Should such a resolution, made out of the generosity of love, by one capable of carrying it out, be condemned as *wrong*? No? Then why not leave those who wish to make such a resolution do so in peace? Again St. Francis de Sales will help:

“Thus of old the Nazarites abstained not only from everything which could intoxicate, but also from grapes and from vinegar of wine (Num. VI, 3), not that these could produce intoxication, but because the taste of the one might excite a desire for the taste of the other. I do not say that we must not use these dangerous things [sports, balls, festivities, display, the drama, and other “useless and dangerous” things], but I do say that we can never take delight in them without periling our devotion.” (*Ibid.*, I, 23)



When I warn against any attachments in such recreations as dancing, the critic says:

“What other proximate reason is there for dancing than the fact that one likes to dance? This does not prevent it from being directed to the glory of God as a remote, or ultimate end.”

Answer: Certainly it does not – as long as there is no *attachment* for it.

“Especially avoid *attaching* yourself to them [games and recreations], for however allowable such things are as amusements, they become evils as soon as they absorb the heart. I do not mean that you may not lawfully take pleasure in your amusement, otherwise it would not be a recreation, but you must not be devoted to it, or eager and absorbed in it.” (*Ibid.*, III, 31)

As for dancing in particular, the gentle St. Francis has this to say:

“I have the same opinion of dances, Philothea, that physicians have of mushrooms: as the best of them, in their opinion, are good for nothing, so I tell you the best balls are good for nothing.” (*op. cit.*, III, 33)

If the Saint thought so little of the relatively innocuous ballroom dancing of his day, what would he think of the modern jitter-bugging or boogie-woogie – even though held under parish auspices!

And in case Philothea should still insist on having mushrooms, the Saint offers her the following meditation points, to be used as she glides about the ballroom:

1. “Whilst you were at this ball, there were souls in torment owing to sins committed or instigated under similar circumstances.
2. “And at the same time holy and pious men were serving God, singing His praise and contemplating His beauty. How much better was their time spent than yours?
3. “Whilst you were dancing, some souls departed this life, in bitter anguish, and thousands of men and women were wandering in the street or lying on their beds of suffering enduring the pains of fever and other diseases...”
4. “Our Blessed Lord, His Mother, the Saints and Angels were watching you, and surely they pitied and lamented over you, seeing your heart occupied and pleased with such unsatisfying trifles.” (*Ibid.*, III, 33)

So now, Philothea, enjoy your dancing; and should you run out of meditation material (as you dance), the Saint encourages you by saying that “God will inspire you with many similar reflections if you live in His fear.”

– 11 –

Applied Christianity (page 125 [p. 131 our edition]): “There is a confusion between the abstract order and the concrete order. In each objection, a statement is advanced that is abstractly true but which, to be realized in actual reality, demands certain conditions.”

The critic: “See Error I in General Comments. The teachings of Catholic theologians regarding the lawfulness of natural actions, natural affections, natural motives, etc., are concerned with these things in the concrete and not only in the abstract.”

Answer: Error I has already been considered. So has the matter of natural actions, natural affections, natural motives, etc. I will, therefore,

confine my attention here to the distinction between theory and practice. In as much as everyone has experience of this distinction, and it must be made in all spheres of activity, it is rather surprising to hear a scholar deny it.

If an architect or an engineer with excellent theoretical knowledge would put up a building without taking into consideration local materials, or atmospheric conditions, or other peculiarities of the place, his work might not prove as lasting as he would hope. Or if a man would study swimming very carefully from books and charts, and, without any further preparation, jump into the water, his sudden surprise would be an effective witness to the distinction between theory and practice.

As for theology, it is defined as a science both speculative and practical. Dogmatic theology contains the largest element of speculation; moral theology is at once speculative and practical; while two special branches, ascetical and mystical theology, are most immediately concerned with practice. In addition, there have arisen a host of outstanding writers and spiritual directors, who, perhaps without extraordinary technical knowledge in any of these several fields, have been skilled in helping souls to realize the ideals of Catholic theology *in practice*.

It is not, therefore, that there is an opposition between speculative and practical theology, but the latter takes into consideration the special conditions that relate only to practice. No doubt speculative theology provides the ultimate doctrinal basis for practice; but on the other hand, both St. Teresa and St. Francis de Sales, require both practical prudence and experience, as well as learning in a spiritual director.

St. Francis de Sales explains the difference between speculative and practical theology as follows:

“But of what do we discourse in prayer? What is the subject of our conference? Theotimus, in it we speak of God only: for of what can love discourse and talk but of the well-beloved? And therefore prayer, and mystical theology, are one same thing. It is called theology, because, as *speculative* theology has God for its object, so this also treats only of God, yet with three differences: for, 1. The former treats of God as God, but the latter treats of Him as sovereignly amiable; that is, the former regards the Divinity of the Supreme Goodness, the latter the supreme goodness of the Divinity. 2. The speculative treats of God with men and amongst men; the mystical speaks of God, with God, and in God Himself. 3. The speculative tends to the knowledge of God,

and the mystical to the love of God.; that, therefore, makes its scholars wise, and learned, and theologians; but this makes its scholars fervent and affectionate, lovers of God, a Philotheus or a Theophilus.” (*Love of God*, VI, 1)

Undoubtedly, the ideal is for every theologian to possess mystical theology as well as the speculative kind; that is, to be affectionate and fervent lovers of God as well as learned. Indeed, it should be that way: for as stepping close to the fire makes us warm, so coming close to God, and being always preoccupied with Him, should make us holy. Alas, it is not always so. The *Imitation* had already hinted that fewer feel compunction than know its definition.

The following observation on the distinction in question (again by St. Francis de Sales) has been inserted by the Church in the office of St. Margaret Mary-Alacoque:

“There is no true knowledge other than that which is given by the Holy Spirit, but this is only given to the humble. Do not we see many theologians who speak wonderful things concerning the virtues, but not in order that they may exercise them? On the other hand, we see many women who know nothing about discursing on the virtues, but know how to perform the works of the virtues admirably. Such as these the Holy Spirit makes wise, because they had fear of the Lord and piety and humility.” (*Autumn Breviary*)

The distinction is of great importance for understanding the school of pious naturalism, for it explains how the members of this school, while keeping the orthodox faith in their speculative minds, and being formally correct (for the most part) in their statements, nevertheless manage to avoid its practical implications in their conduct. As there are invalids who remain cold even when they are wrapped up in blankets and placed in the sun, so the devotees of this piety manage to remain almost completely cold in the presence of the very Sun of Justice.

– 12 –

Applied Christianity (page 147 [p. 155 our edition]): “In order that the will may be more and more filled with charity, God must first empty it of earthly loves. To this purpose He removes from us the creatures that we love, surrounds us with malice, hatred, etc. Thus our wills are voided of the love of creatures and make room for the divine love.”

The critic: “God is not responsible for the sins committed against us.”

Answer: It is not said in *Applied Christianity* that God is responsible for the sins committed against us. Once more, my words undergo a subtle transformation in the critic’s restatement. Nor does the book leave room for any possible misunderstanding on this point. In Part I, Chapter II, [rect: Part II, Chap. V] (page 80 [p. 84 our edition]) the doctrine of God’s permissive will in regard to evil is set forth.

On the other hand, the book does affirm that God’s Providence is absolutely universal and therefore includes even sinful actions. That is to say, God is able to employ sinful actions for His own end, which is the sanctification of souls. Thus He used the wickedness of Herod, the criminal weakness of Pilate, the supreme malice of Caiphas in His plan of redemption.

If my critic denies this, he is once more found in his now familiar position of attacking a Catholic doctrine.

– 13 –

Applied Christianity (Page 172 [p. 180 our edition]): “Now the devil can enter the intellect, deceiving us with falsehood. Hence we should not enter the intellect, but stay in the will and refuse to argue with Satan.”

The critic: “The devil cannot enter into the intellect any more than he can into the will. On both these faculties he can act only indirectly. (Herve, *Theo. Dogm.*, II, n. 307)”

Answer: A technicality. Naturally the devil enters the intellect according to the mode of operation proper to the intellect. And the intellect works by forming its ideas from the data of the senses. In other words, in a certain sense, all knowledge enters the intellect indirectly. Hence, the devil darkens the intellect by working on the imagination and the senses. (I II, 80,2) But St. Thomas also points out that the devil can appeal to us likewise by persuasion, i.e., by persuading that an object is good. (I II, 80, 1) Both aspects of temptation are illustrated in the temptation of Eve. She saw that “the tree was good to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightful to behold.” And the devil’s persuasion: “For God doth know that in what day soever you shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened: and you shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil.” (Gen. 3, 5-6)

Now it will be observed that *Applied Christianity* did not discuss whether the devil can enter the intellect and will directly or indirectly.

That is a technical matter that I simply did not enter into. It is my critic who raises the issue; hence, his remark is simply irrelevant to the statement in the book. All that I said – and here is the real point at issue – is that the devil can enter the intellect; and this he is able to do, whatever the procedure he follows, even against our own will and desire. On the other hand, as St. Thomas teaches (*loc. cit.*), he cannot enter the will at all *without the will's own consent*. And he can work to influence the will only by seeking to persuade and seduce it *from the outside*, i.e., from the intellect. In a word, the will is a fortification that only God can breach. A soul in temptation, when it leaves the will to reason with the devil, leaves an impregnable fortress to enter territory into which the devil can force his way and spread his evil influence. This is an accurate description of the case, leaving the technical matter to one side, and this is what is said in *Applied Christianity*.

It is, once more, my critic who is in error; not only in saying that the devil can enter the will in the same way that he can enter the intellect, but also in believing that he can enter the will at all without the will's consent.

It is, however, unnecessary to go into this problem in a book like *Applied Christianity*. I make no apology for omitting it.

– 14 –

Applied Christianity (page 200 [p. 211 our edition]): “So also, human nature, which is the starting-point of our efforts to serve God, is itself based on the supernatural order.”

The critic: “Human nature may be said to be based on the supernatural order as far as the intention of God is concerned. But it is not based on the supernatural order ontologically.”

On the same matter, he says elsewhere:

“The usual Catholic recommendation is to develop both natural and supernatural virtues simultaneously.”

Answer: As to the first of these comments I am in perfect accord with what it says: nature is the basis of the supernatural order ontologically, whereas in the intention of God, or, to put it otherwise, in the order of final causality, or ultimately, the supernatural order is the foundation of nature. While in *Applied Christianity*, I emphasize the fact that nature is ultimately based on the supernatural order, I do not deny that, in a certain sense, grace is based on nature. What I do is to avoid such words as *ontological* and *final causality*, which are meaningless to all except those who have technical theological or (philosophical) training. That

such technical terms express the idea accurately and succinctly – to one who understands them – is true, but that they would be of value in a book such as mine I do not see. My purpose is to enforce the same idea by similar words and by examples. Thus in the words chosen by my critic for attack, nature is spoken of as *the starting point* of our efforts. And in the sentence just preceding this, I compared nature to the stone foundation of a building – which, however, presupposes a deeper foundation on rock or solid ground. My statement was supported by these words of Pope Pius XII:

“For Christ alone is the Corner-stone (Eph. 2, 20) on which man and society can find stability and salvation. On this corner-stone the Church is built... On the other hand, any other building which has not been founded solidly on the teaching of Christ rests on shifting sands, and is destined to perish miserably.”
(*Summi Pontificatus*)

It will be noticed that the Holy Father gives this teaching without stopping to point out the distinction between *ontological* and *final causality*.

My purpose in insisting that the supernatural is ultimately the basis for the natural was practical and pedagogical. And this leads me to my critic's second comment.

I do not know exactly what he means by the “usual Catholic recommendation.” If he means the *correct* Catholic recommendation, then I agree – with a reservation to be noticed in a moment. If he means “the recommendation usually made by Catholics,” then I must demur, for the spirit of naturalism has entered the minds of many Catholics and leads them away from what is correct.

Thus we hear, in fact, a great deal about cultivating the natural virtues, while very little, almost nothing, about the supernatural virtues. In schools, the natural virtues, especially civic virtues, are greatly emphasized. And if children are told to supernaturalize such virtues, it is usually only by clothing their actions “with a simple adventitious supernatural modality, springing from the influence of charity, which should direct all our acts to God.” (Garrigou-Lagrange, *op. cit.*, page 61) This is because their teachers themselves “have not gone beyond this conception” (*Ibid.*) and cannot instruct them in the specifically supernatural virtues, neglecting also to teach their pupils how to live by faith, hope and charity. (See *infra*, #15)

Furthermore, we see, under the banner of Catholic Action, all kinds

of activities organized under Catholic auspices – athletics, social activities, supervised recreations – with the avowed purpose of teaching the natural virtues. One can attend many of the meetings of these organizations – yes, and the more select meetings of their leaders – without hearing a word about the supernatural virtues. Nevertheless, such organizations describe themselves as “Catholic Action.” They could better be described as “Natural” Action.

It was because this is the usual practice of a great many Catholic teachers and youth leaders that I wrote as I did in *Applied Christianity*. “We will first teach them the natural virtues,” they say; “afterwards we can build on these by means of the supernatural virtues.” But the work of building never begins; they labor perpetually on the foundations. Somehow there is never time to get around to the supernatural virtues. They are like a man who, owning a magnificent palace, never leaves the cellar.

Now it is wrong for Catholic teachers to devote themselves to the natural virtues *alone*, or to put those virtues *first*, at least in their minds and intentions. And that for the following reason:

a. It is the doctrine of Catholic theology that it is impossible to keep the *whole* natural law, especially for a long time, without the assistance of divine grace. And to make use of this divine assistance requires that they know, from the beginning, how to *correspond* with grace, i.e., how to practice the supernatural virtues, especially charity, which is the ultimate root of merit.

b. Such a policy, will deprive children and students of large quantities of grace, since it is through the supernatural virtues, and especially charity, that increases of grace are merited. Whatever merit accrues to natural virtues does so, not in virtue of their natural goodness, but in virtue of the influx of grace which is their principle. Moreover, this merit has degrees and can be greatly increased, especially through the exercise of charity. It is a poor teacher that robs his own pupils.

c. Finally, such a policy ignores the fact that – as my critic himself admits – the supernatural order, and therefore the supernatural virtues, are first *in the intention of God*. This fact has great practical significance. For to say that the supernatural virtues are first in the mind of God is to say that they are the *final cause* of the other virtues, that is, the aim and ultimate result towards which all other virtues and actions should be directed, and according to which they should be measured and regulated as by their determining norm. Hence, when we teach natural virtues without directing them to the supernatural, we are like a man who uses

tools but without purposing to make anything, or takes trips without ever going anywhere.

That it is the supernatural virtues that are the ultimate end of Christian education was emphasized by Pope Pius XI:

“The proper and *immediate* end of Christian education is to cooperate with divine grace in forming the true and perfect Christian, that is, to form Christ Himself in those regenerated by baptism, according to the emphatic expression of the Apostle: ‘My little children, of whom I am in labor again, until Christ be formed in you’ (Gal. 4, 19) For the true Christian must live a supernatural life in Christ: ‘Christ who is your life’ (Col. 3, 4), and display it in all his actions: ‘That the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal flesh.’” (II Cor. 4, 11)

Therefore, as we ought in general be “imitators of God” (Eph. 5, 1), so should Catholic teachers and youth mentors imitate Him in this respect that they have *first* in *their* intentions also – and therefore as the final cause of all their efforts, directing, measuring, disposing all that they do – the purpose to form “Christ Himself in those regenerated by baptism.” In this respect, it is erroneous to say even that the *correct* Catholic recommendation is to teach both natural and supernatural virtues at once. The correct Catholic recommendation is to put the *supernatural* virtues first. Of course, for pious naturalism to admit this would be suicidal.

– 15 –

Applied Christianity (page 202 [p. 212 our edition]): “Thus smoking, drinking, taking recreation, dancing, etc., would be meritorious simply by the fact that they are performed by one in the state of grace, no matter how much worldliness might be contained in such actions. This teaching releases people from all spiritual effort except that of going to the sacraments; it allows them to live perfectly human, natural lives, while remaining as unconscious of the supernatural as a ground mole is of light.”

The critic; “See error 2 in the General Comments. Why cannot smoking, etc., done for reasonable relaxation, become meritorious, as long as the ultimate motive is God, and they are done according to the rules of temperance?”

This objection stands for a whole group. Thus, on the same subject he says elsewhere:

“There is no reason for believing that the love of God diminishes in a man who smokes and drinks with due moderation, observing the laws of temperance.”

Answer: I have dealt elsewhere with “error” 2 in the General Comments; also with the doctrine of attachments and the mode in which they dispose the soul towards sin. Here I confine my attention to the matter of temperance, which the critic everywhere holds up as the only necessary bulwark against sin.

Now if he meant *supernatural* temperance, I would agree. But that he does not is evident from two facts: a. he never makes the distinction or recommends supernatural temperance; b. he explicitly rejects the ideal and practice required by superance.

Mere human temperance is not a sufficient defense against passion, against temptation, against the driving force of concupiscence. Human temperance knows nothing of the Fall or of its consequences; its rule of moderation, prescribed by reason, is inadequate to overcome all the dangers of this life. This inadequacy of reason is brought out graphically by a famous sentence of Newman:

“Quarry the granite rock with razors, or moor the vessel with a thread of silk; then may you hope with such keen and delicate instruments as human knowledge and human reason to contend against those giants, the passion and the pride of man.” (*Idea of a University*, V, 9)

And the practical result of relying on such “keen and delicate instruments” is written down in a terrible sentence by André Gide:

“By moderation I thought I could master evil, and precisely through this moderation the evil one has taken possession of me.” (Pfleger, *Wrestlers with Christ*, page 146)

What we need, beyond mere human temperance, is supernatural temperance, that temperance which according to St. Thomas “relinquishes, *as far as nature can bear it*, what nature demands, *temperantia vero relinquat, in quantum natura patitur, quæ corporis usus requirit.*” (I II, 61, 5)

Obviously, it is not this temperance which the critic is speaking of; by practicing moderation he does not mean we should give up all that nature can bear. Nature could easily bear giving up altogether, or almost so, all the indulgences and gratifications which he defends, even for Christians, up to the verge of sinful excess.

My critic shows no conception whatever of the supernatural infused moral virtues:

“While reading the part of St. Thomas’ *Summa* dealing with these Christian moral virtues, especially prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, many think these are only the natural virtues described by Aristotle and that they are clothed with a simple adventitious supernatural modality, springing from the influence of charity, which should direct all our acts to God. Some theologians have not gone beyond this conception. [!]

“The thought of St. Thomas is far loftier. According to his teaching, the Christian moral virtues are infused, and, because of their formal object, essentially distinct from the highest acquired moral virtues described by the greatest philosophers. These acquired moral virtues, useful as they may be, could be continually developed without ever attaining the formal object of the Christian virtues. An infinite difference exists between Aristotelian temperance, governed solely by right reason, and Christian temperance, ruled by divine faith and supernatural prudence. St. Thomas says (I II, 63, 4): ‘Evidently the measure to be imposed on our passions differs essentially according as it springs from the human rule of reason or from the divine rule. For example, in the use of food the measure prescribed by reason has for its end the avoidance of what is harmful to health and to the exercise of reason itself, while according to the divine law, as St. Paul says, man must chastise his body and bring it into subjection by abstinence and other similar austerities.’” (Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 61-62)

The school of pious naturalism prefers the Aristotelian virtues, and either knows nothing about the others or regards as fanatics those who preach or endeavor to practice them.

– 16 –

Applied Christianity (page 209 [p. 219 our edition]); “The Thomistic opinion on the intention required for a meritorious action as stated by Father Hugo is that a formally good natural intention is sufficient for a meritorious action when performed by one in the state of grace. Father Hugo then says: ‘It is rated as a probable opinion; . . . one of the times when it is not permissible to use such an opinion is when it concerns a necessary means of

salvation. Now the present controversy concerns the doctrine of merit, which is a necessary means of salvation; for we can enjoy heaven only if we merit it. Therefore, it is not safe to employ St. Thomas's opinion in practice.”

The critic: “We merit heaven if we merely obtain the state of grace by attrition with a sacrament.”

Answer: It is the practice of pious naturalism to minimize every supernatural duty or find some loophole whereby to escape it. The present objection is a good example of this. While what the critic says is, strictly speaking, true, it is certainly misleading and unsafe. Its effect, moreover, is, obviously, to release men from spiritual effort, to shout down any appeal that would urge the faithful to go beyond the absolutely required minimum.

I say it is misleading: for attrition is not sufficient of itself to *justify*. Only with the sacrament can it justify: and it is, then, not the attrition, but the infusion of grace and charity that justifies. In other words, attrition prepares the soul to receive charity, the sacrament infuses charity: but neither the attrition nor the sacrament dispenses from the need of charity. There is no sacrament or ceremony in the church that dispenses from charity: it is necessary for salvation.

“The repentance which does not reject the love of God, though as yet it be without it, is a good and desirable penitence, but imperfect, and it cannot give salvation *until it attains love and is mingled therewith*. So that as the great Apostle said that though he should ‘deliver his body to be burned, and all his goods to the poor, wanting charity it would profit him nothing’ so we may truly say that though our penitence were so great that it should cause our eyes to dissolve in tears, and our hearts to break with sorrow, yet if we have not the holy love of God, all this would profit nothing for eternal life.” (St. Francis de Sales, *Love of God*, II, 20)

But having gotten this far, pious naturalism sees another minimum, a new loophole, a fresh opportunity to escape spiritual effort. “This charity which you speak of,” it says, “and which you say is necessary, is an infused virtue – infused by God: we don’t have to do anything about it.”

True: but charity is an operative habit: its purpose is to be used, to be active, to express itself in works. When one labors to obtain an acquired habit, like typing or driving a car, it is in order to exercise that habit. So it is with charity. Writes St. Francis de Sales:

“For, after all, charity being an active quality cannot be long without either acting or dying: it is, say our Ancients, of the nature of Rachel, who also represented it. ‘Give me,’ she said to her husband, ‘children, otherwise I shall die;’ and charity urges the heart which she has espoused to make her fertile of good works; otherwise she will perish.” (*Love of God*, IV, 2)

We have elsewhere cited the text of St. Thomas (II II, 24, 10), where he teaches the same thing, i.e., that failure to exercise charity disposes the soul indirectly for its loss.

Therefore, if any, relying on my critic’s minimum advice, should continue to go on and “eat, drink, make good cheer,” pushing aside the loftier duties of supernatural living as not for them, their best, and perhaps only chance of entering into heaven would be if they were to die immediately after baptism or on the way home from confession.

The possession of grace is of course the essential thing required for salvation, but the grace which God gives us in Baptism or penance is an initial endowment, a start, a beginning. We are now to put our talents out on interest, we are to make the long ascent up the mount of perfection, we are to grow a little more each day towards that maturity of the Christian life which is called holiness. But the clients of pious naturalism bury their talents; instead of climbing, they remain always at the bottom; instead of growing, they remain always at the beginning. They adopt this practice as a policy and a principle. They identify it with the Christian life. Its defense they call the common teaching of theologians. And they fiercely denounce anyone who would dare to do otherwise than they do.

– 17 –

Applied Christianity (page, 212 [p. 224 our edition]): “Human prudence directs us to obtain a moderate share of this world’s goods and to pursue other earthly ends with moderation. Christian prudence teaches us to scorn the things of this earth and to despise all things for God.”

The critic: “It is quite in accord with Christian prudence to get a moderate share of this world’s goods. The Popes would not have given us their social encyclicals if it were against Christianity to become moderately wealthy.”

Answer: The words which the critic here objects to are simply a paraphrase, almost a direct quotation, from St. Thomas Aquinas. Had the critic looked, he would have seen my definition supported by the

words of the Angelic Doctor on the *very next page*. The latter's words are:

“Prudence despises all worldly things for the contemplation of divine things: It directs all the thoughts of the soul towards God.”
 (“*Ita scilicet quod prudentia omnia mundana divinorum contemplatione despiciat, omnemque animæ cogitationem in divina sola dirigat...*”) (I II, 61, 5)

My critic is in truth a Jack-the-Giant Killer!

As to the Popes with their social encyclicals, they were fighting for elementary justice – not for wealth but for a living and a family wage. Their words do not conflict with the Church's love of poverty: the Popes were fighting, not poverty, but destitution. Hence, while the Church, on the one hand, is fighting for a sufficiency of this world's goods for the destitute, she has at the same time encouraged innumerable souls to renounce all things and imitate the poverty of Jesus.

Of course, what Jesus wants, above all, is poverty of spirit, and he wants this of all Christians, of the laity as well as of those who bind themselves with the vow of poverty. This poverty of spirit is essentially a mental attitude, a condition of mind and heart – an “inward separation from the world,” in Newman's fine definition of Christian holiness. Actual poverty is no guarantee that this inward detachment is possessed: the possession of riches, while making such an attitude more difficult, does not prevent it. Hence St. Francis de Sales writes two chapters on the subject: “Of Poverty of Spirit to be observed in the Midst of Riches:” and “How to practice Richness of Spirit in Real Poverty.” Let those be consulted if there is any doubt that inward detachment and renunciation are necessary for devotion.

It is this inward attitude, this inward separation from the world, that *Applied Christianity* seeks to inculcate. Nowhere is it said that Christians may not be moderately wealthy. The words, again, are my critic's, not mine. As far as I am concerned, I believe that Christians may have even great wealth – provided they use the world “as if they used it not.” (I Cor. 7, 31)

That my description of supernatural prudence (which is an interior virtue) is not exaggerated is sufficiently vindicated by the following:

“Nature gladly beholdeth things temporal, she joyeth at worldly winnings, is heavy for worldly losings, and anon is moved with a sharp word. But grace beholdeth things everlasting. She trusteth not to things temporal, and is not troubled with the loss of them, nor grieved with a forward word: for she hath

laid her treasure in God and in ghostly things, which may not perish. Nature is covetous and more gladly taketh than giveth; she loveth much to have property and private things. But grace is piteous and liberal to the poor, she fleeth singular profits, she is content with little and judgeth it more blessed to give than to take.” (*Imitation*, III, 54)

– 18 –

Applied Christianity (page 50 [p. 54 our edition]): “The Scribes and Pharisees were not evil men, but good men, naturally good, since they observed scrupulously all the commandments of the natural law.”

The critic: “It is not easy to reconcile the statement that the Scribes and Pharisees were naturally good men with the indictment of the Son of God: ‘Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you are like whited sepulchers, which outwardly appear to men beautiful, but within are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. So you outwardly appear just to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.’” (Matt. 23, 27)⁸

Answer: The impression given by the way in which this objection is stated, whether wittingly or not, is that I am giving praise and commendation to men who were condemned by Jesus. Such an interpretation of my words is surprising, for that is certainly not my intention, nor, when the whole context of the remark is considered, is it the meaning of the passage in question.

The purpose of *Applied Christianity* in this place is rather to inquire *why* the Scribes and Pharisees were condemned. For from the mere fact that they were condemned by Jesus, it does not follow that they were condemned for violating the *natural* law. They could have been, and in fact they were condemned for their failure to fulfill the *supernatural* law, the law of love, that law which obliges us to love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves, and which, according to Jesus, contains the whole law and the prophets. *Applied Christianity* notes the fact that although the Pharisees observed the natural law, they were condemned; seeing in this fact a clear demonstration of the insufficiency of the Mosaic code and of more natural righteousness for salvation. My observations

8. This objection is taken, not from the mimeographed sheets, but from the review in the *Ecclesiastical Review* (July 1945). It appears to be the only point in the review not appearing in the sheets.

on this point were based on the words of Jesus – words which at once concede a kind of justice to the Pharisees and yet affirm its insufficiency in man’s supernatural state: “For I say to you that unless your justice abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the Kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 5, 20)

Even if the interpretation of *Applied Christianity* were incorrect in this respect, the error would simply be one of fact or of judgment, without any doctrinal “implications.” But its correctness is vouched for by the following exegetical note, which says that the woes pronounced by Our Lord against the Scribes and Pharisees were not the result of violations of the Mosaic code, but

“... may be understood in the specific sense that the Scribes and Pharisees refused to accept the teaching of Christ and so enter His Kingdom, or more probably, as in Luke, in the general sense of eternal salvation.” (*A commentary on the New Testament*, prepared by the Catholic Biblical Association under the patronage of the Episcopal Committee of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, page 156).

And St. Augustine conceded a certain natural justice to the Pharisees:

“This justice of the Pharisees is that they should not kill: the justice of those who will enter into the kingdom of heaven is that they should not become angry without cause. Not to kill therefore is the minimum; and he who fulfills only that minimum will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. He who satisfies the obligation not to kill, will not at once become great and worthy of the kingdom of heaven. He mounts up a step, however; and he will be perfect if he does not become angry without cause; and thus perfected, he will be farther then ever from killing. Accordingly, He who teaches that we should not become angry does not destroy the law which tells us not to kill but rather fulfills it: so that while we outwardly refrain from killing, we inwardly preserve our innocence by avoiding anger.” (*Roman Breviary*, V Sunday after Pentecost).

– 19 –

As a final example, I will take two passages where my critic accuses me of exactly opposite errors. In one place he calls into question my praise of and insistence on “blind obedience.” I had said previously, when dealing with this subject, and to guard against any possible misinterpre-

tation of the principle (*Applied Christianity*, page 61 [Cf Part IV, Chap. V, p. 162]), that a subject is not obliged to obey a superior who should command him to do something sinful.

My critic says: “The author is correct in saying that we may not obey a superior commanding something sinful. But how can we know if a command is sinful unless we examine it? In other words, we may not give up our judgment, or act contrary to it in obeying.”

In another place, my critic, fastening upon a passage from an article I wrote in the *Catholic Worker* in defense of Conscientious Objectors, accuses me of precisely an opposite error in my conception of obedience, i.e., of undermining authority by allowing exceptions even when conscience demands it.

The easiest way to meet such determined fault-finding would be simply to step aside and allow the two objections to collide and cancel each other. Or, I could wait until my critic makes up his mind as to just which of the two he wishes to prefer against me: then, as an answer, I could quote his own contradictory charge. For, although writers sometimes express ideas that are inconsistent with one another, not even the greatest geniuses of inconsistency could very well hold contradictory beliefs on exactly the same point. The most disordered mind could not be passionately attached to opinions that nullify one another – any more than a man could rush off in opposite directions at once.

However, for the sake of the truths involved, I will answer in detail. As to the objection against “blind obedience,” it is simply incomprehensible. As I said, there is no occasion for misunderstanding: I had beforehand, as my critic himself admits even in stating his objection, secured myself against any possible allegation of condoning immoral actions in the name of obedience. What I had in mind, in recommending blind obedience, was such obedience as that shown at Nazareth by Jesus when, although endowed with the fullness of wisdom, He nevertheless obeyed the commands of Mary and Joseph, whose prudence and judgment, however great, were inferior to His own. Or, to take a lesser example, there was the monk of the desert, John of Lycopolis, who in obedience to his superior, planted a dry stick and watered it every day for a year. By such obedience, approved by saints and spiritual writers, and by the Church itself, subjects *do* give up their own *judgment*; but their conduct involves no deflection from righteousness or morality.

Would my critic recommend that subjects obey only when the

commands given them accord with their own judgment? If so, I think that he, and not I, would be out of harmony with the Church's teaching. Surely, too, he must be aware that I did not originate the phrase, or the idea, of "blind obedience." He will, for example, find such "blind obedience" praised as the highest perfection of obedience by Father Alphonsus Rodriguez, S. J. in his *Perfection and the Practice of Christian Virtue* (III, page 298), a work that is used extensively in almost all religious novitiates. Among other things this author says that blind obedience

"Does what is ordered and subjects its judgment and will to the will and judgment of the superior, taking for granted all that is ordained by superiors without seeking reasons why it should obey, nor acting on the reasons which occur to that effect, but obeying rather on this sole consideration that such is obedience."

My critic seems also to have overlooked the fact that, to illustrate and explain "my" conception of obedience in *Applied Christianity* I quoted verbatim and at some length from St. Alphonsus Liguori.

Now To Take Up the Opposite Criticism

Truly it is difficult to satisfy this critic! One moment, he takes me to task for emphasis on obedience by not allowing sufficient latitude to moral judgment and discernment. The next moment he finds fault when I defend the exercise of moral discernment, even in obedience, on the part of a number of citizens. The truth is that in defending blind obedience I had allowed for an exceptional case, i.e., the case of unjust laws, or commands. And in defending the Conscientious Objector, I was simply illustrating the exceptional case. For a Catholic to refuse to share in a war the injustice of which he is convinced is quite in accord with authoritative Catholic theology. Thus, for example, it is said by the eminent Dominican theologian, Francis de Victoria, whose authority on the subject of war is almost unique:

"If a subject is convinced of the injustice of a war, he ought not to serve in it, *even on the command of his prince.*" (*On the Law of War*. Italics mine.)

Furthermore, in allowing that Catholic Conscientious Objectors may exercise their right even in spite of the bishops who declare for the justice of the war, I was basing my remarks on a statement sponsored in 1941 by the Ethics Committee of "The Catholic Association for Interna-

tional Peace.” The statement was as follows:

“Do these views [i.e., the one, of those bishops who spoke publicly in favor of conscientious objectors, the other, of those bishops who sanction war], or does either of them offer a definite solution to the uncertainties with which we are now dealing? They do not; *nor were they so intended by their respective authors. They are far from being sufficiently authoritative to carry binding force for the consciences of all Catholics in the United States.* They do, however, [i.e., both views] point the way to permissive courses of action.” (*The Morality of Conscientious Objection to War*, page 36. Italics mine)

This statement was my authority, for the view which I expressed in the *Catholic Worker*. It seems to be a sufficient answer to my critic’s statement:

“When, therefore, the bishops of an entire nation allow Catholics to take part in a war and even pray for victory, etc., it is certainly rash for a private individual to declare the war unjust. This is a condemnation of the hierarchy, and (contrary to what the writer says) it does express a lack of respect and of obedience to episcopal authority.”

In the present circumstances the statement of the Ethics Committee may seem to be very bold indeed – yet it was made as late as 1941. It was the foundation of my own opinion.

In criticizing my statement, the critic does not mention the authority upon which it was based. However, it is a very relevant fact. The members of the committee who sponsored the report were all distinguished Catholic Scholars both lay and clerical, some of them professors at University. The pamphlet in which the Report was drawn up was sponsored by the Catholic Association for International Peace, and it was distributed by the National Catholic Welfare Council.



The critic: “The insistence on authority, to the exclusion of joy and happiness that are inherent in Catholic life, and particularly the gloomy attitude towards all that is natural, gives this treatise a resemblance to those of Baius, Quesnel, Jansenius, etc., even though the author has not gone so far astray theologically as protagonists of the rigorous and sad way to heaven.”

Answer: Joy is the fruit of love; it is a repose in the possession of the thing loved (*quies in bono est gaudium vel delectatio*). (I II, 25, 2)

Hence, there are different kinds of joy, as there are different kinds of love. Joy is thus an equivocal word; not to be misled by it, we must understand in what sense it is used.

Thus the sinner speaks of his life as one of joy – he pursues such a life because he thinks his way is the only one of true joy. He loves evil, although under the delusion that it is good; his joy is in the doing of evil. However gross these joys look to spiritual men, he himself is devoted to them: he is really fascinated by their false appearance, even though he is made miserable by their cruel tyranny.

Then there is the joy of the natural man, of the pagan, of those who tread the primrose path of this world, plucking the wayside fruits as they dance along. Their pleasures are innocent and lawful, so long as they are sought without moral disorder. Whether the pagans always avoid this disorder is not so certain, for they always represent only the attractive and innocent side of this life. But one has not to live long in this world to know that evil is not far from these pleasures – is, in fact, just behind each shiny, deceiving surface. To them the fruits of the world bring happiness. Hence their motto: *Carpe diem, gather rosebuds while ye may*.

It is to be expected, and it is true, that when the votaries of pious naturalism speak of joy and happiness, they have in mind the enjoyment of these attractive fruits of the earth. That is why they live in such continual terror of the cross, of talk about mortification, of penance, of the whole supernatural life. They fear that they will have their rosebuds plucked away from them, that they will have to cease gathering their pleasures. And this they will not do; for, they say, these pleasures are innocent and lawful.

Innocent and lawful, yes: nevertheless, St. Francis de Sales compared them to the mandrakes for which Rachel was willing to give up the favors of Jacob. Mandrakes (says the saint) are attractive to behold, but have an insipid taste and tend to stupefy those who use them. For this reason they are a perfect type of the pleasures of this world, which are also attractive to look at but insipid to the taste, and yet have a strange power to intoxicate those who eat them. For such mandrakes, the votaries of pious naturalism are willing to give up the favors and consolations, not indeed of Jacob, but of the infinitely lovable God of Jacob. (*Love of God*, X, 9)

There is a third kind of joy. It is the fruit of the love of God. It is a supernatural joy which St. Paul places among the twelve fruits of the Holy Ghost, by whom “the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts.”

(Rom. 5, 5). This Joy does not feed on mandrakes. In fact, it scorns the mandrakes, not indeed as evil, but as too tasteless and trivial to satisfy the appetite of the children of God for the true “bread of the children.” This joy does not fear sacrifice; it does not flee from the cross; it embraces the cross.

“Sacrifice is usually difficult and irksome. Only love can make it easy; and perfect love can make it a joy. We are willing to give in proportion as we love. And when love is perfect, the sacrifice is complete.” (*Marriage Ritual*)

Those in whom there is true and fervent love of God have within themselves an inexhaustible spring of joy to sustain and refresh them throughout the most arduous labors, under the most cruel crosses. Outwardly their lives may seem gloomy and afflicted – to those to whom happiness means feeding on mandrakes. But inwardly they are absorbed in an unfailing joy, the one true source of the joyfulness of Catholic life, the joy that no man can take from them.

“Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again” – this of natural joy; “he however who drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting”: this is the source of supernatural joy. (John 4, 13-14)

Admittedly, it is the purpose of *Applied Christianity* to persuade Christians to renounce, not only the sham joy of loving evil, but also the shallow unsatisfactory joy of loving baubles. But that such an idea resembles Jansenism could only occur to men who have lost all idea of what is meant by a supernatural life. “Rejoice *in the Lord*. Speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual canticles, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord.” (Phil. 40 4; Eph. 5, 19) This is the true joy – though it may not seem so outwardly. “Giotto lived in a gloomier town than Euripides, but he lived in a gayer universe.” G. K. Chesterton.

Chapter IV

The Folly of the Cross

The Objection

One of my critic's objections, although very short and seemingly insignificant, opens up upon an issue of larger importance than at first appears. This time the "erroneous" passage is taken, not from *Applied Christianity*, but from my pamphlet, *Weapons of the Spirit*. Of course, among his Particular Comments, the critic states substantially the same objection to several passages of *Applied Christianity*. But he makes only incidental references to the doctrine as it appears there; although it involves the very central doctrine of the book (see all the chapters under "The Folly of the Cross") as of Christianity itself. That is why I take up the matter separately.

Well, then, my critic quotes me as saying (*Weapons of the Spirit*, page 40) that,

"The primary reason for penance comes not from sin, but from the fact that we are destined to have our happiness in the supernatural knowledge and love of God."

Then he comments:

"This statement is surely contrary to common theological teaching. As any theological manual will explain, Penance is a virtue that urges one to sorrow for his own past sins. E.g., St. Thomas defines Penance as '*dolor moderatus de peccatis præteritis*.' (III, 85, 1). According to the definition of Father Hugo, Christ could have had penance; but this is absolutely false. The Holy Office once condemned a suggested invocation; *Cor Jesu pœnitens, misere nobis* [Repentant Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us]. It is surely not the proper thing for a Catholic writer to depart from the common theological teaching in order to support his own views."

Here is the ever present refrain: *contrary to common theological teaching*. Here is the dark insinuation of a condemned view. Let us see.

A Word Quibble

Nowhere is the amazing blindness of my critic more apparent than in this objection, in which he condemns me – yea, puts me among the blasphemers of Christ's Person – for affirming a doctrine (i.e., that Christ

was a penitent) which he has just quoted me as explicitly and emphatically denying! And the “private view” which the critic would have me abandon as “contrary to theological teaching,” is nothing less than a basic doctrine of Christianity! Alas, for the theologians to whose teachings it is contrary! But I think that there are few besides the critic himself!

This time it is a word quibble which is the occasion for my critic’s objection. The word is “*penance*.” My critic’s definition of penance, considered *as a virtue*, is quite correct – there is no need to look up a manual. Nevertheless, the word *penance*, like other words, has several meanings. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, in Catholic usage it has four – including the sense in which my critic defines it, and also the somewhat different sense in which I use it in the passage under consideration.

It “designates (1) a virtue [this is the sense in which my critic defines it]; (2) a sacrament of the New Law; (3) a canonical punishment inflicted according to the earlier discipline of the Church; (4) a work of satisfaction enjoined upon the recipient of the sacrament.”

Used in this last sense, it comes to include all the works of satisfaction and in fact all the works of self-denial and mortification. Hence, we commonly describe as “penances” all those good works which contain elements of labor, hardship, and self-denial. It is this last sense in which I use the word, as both the context and my subject-matter reveal, the whole chapter being about mortification and the works of penance, without a word about the virtue of penance. And if it is true, as my critic says, that Our Lord did not practice the virtue of penance in the strict sense, being Himself without sin, it is equally true that He did frequently perform what we commonly call the works of penance – prayer, fasting, the keeping of vigils, in a word, all the labors and hardships of His life. He did them from a somewhat different motive from that which animates sinners; but He did them. His motive was not to make satisfaction for personal sins, but vicariously for the sins of others. In *the first place*, however, His motive was *to merit for us* the grace needed to elevate us to the supernatural plane; and it was by this interiorly elevating and justifying grace that our sins were also to be remitted.

And that precisely is what I am endeavoring to say in the passage under consideration. The case of Jesus, which my critic cites against me, is in fact the most perfect example of what I was saying, i.e., that there is another motive besides sin for doing penance. While he tries to make me say that Jesus is a penitent (in the strict sense) and therefore a sinner, I am

in fact saying just the opposite, namely, that all men, even those who are sinners, in addition to the sinless Jesus, have another, a more positive, and a prior motive for mortification, for renunciation, for all our spiritual sacrifices, for what, in brief, we call the works of penance. It is because the word *penance*, which is so closely associated with sin, tends to obscure this other and prior motive that I was so insistent on pointing it out. And this other motive – to finish the quotation from *Weapons of the Spirit*, which was so cruelly dismembered by my critic – is,

“The primary reason for penance comes not from sin, but from the fact that we are destined to have our happiness in the supernatural knowledge and love of God; because of this we must renounce a merely natural mode of life, since ‘by nature we are children of wrath’ (Eph. 2, 3), and conduct our lives on the much higher plane of a nature that is now divinized by grace, that is, as children of God.”

In *Applied Christianity* the same truth is stated as follows (page 87 [p. 91 our edition]):

“... The supernatural rises out of the destruction and death of the natural man, just as the phoenix of old was said to arise out of its own ashes. This death of the natural takes place independently of sin, whether original or personal sin. The necessity of dying to nature derives from the very fact that we have a supernatural destiny. Our supernatural destiny requires that we abandon the merely natural plane of living.”

Perhaps it would be better not to speak of the fastings of Christ, since He was sinless, as works of penance. But it is warranted – and understood – by usage. Perhaps it would have been better to have avoided the word *penance* in my discussion also, and to have said, that, besides the motive of personal satisfaction, there is another, a higher, and a prior motive for *our mortification, our renunciations*, in short for the entire element of *sacrifice* in the Christian religion; and that this motive is to merit the grace by which we may continue to live on the supernatural plane, thus to fulfill our supernatural destiny. However, as just explained, by so doing I would sacrifice the very point I was trying to make, i.e., that the word *penance*, besides its association with sin, has another element of meaning; and, in any case, I was using the word *penance* in a current and legitimate sense.

The Deeper Issue

Perhaps this answer could be cut short here, but it will be most useful to carry the inquiry further. For I am sure that, even though I were to change the word *penance* to *mortification*, to any other similar word, the critic would still object. For basically, it is clear, what he objects to is not simply my choice of words, but to the doctrine itself, word quibble being simply the occasion for the attack. He objects to the affirmation that the primary reason for penance (i.e., for the works of penance, or mortification, or renunciation – whatever word he wishes) is *not sin*. This is what he calls my private opinion, and which he says is contrary to the common teaching of theologians. In other words, he believes that in all of us except in Christ and Our Lady (whose mortifications, I suppose, he would explain as vicarious) *all* mortifications, all sacrifices, are and should be motivated by the need to make satisfaction *for sin*. This is a characteristic, and a result, of what we already called “sin mentality.” He sees the whole Christian economy solely in relation to sin. He thinks that a Christian’s only duty is to avoid sin; that he must deny himself and carry the cross only on account of sin; and that, for the most part, it is mortification enough for him to renounce sin. He does not understand that Christianity is essentially a supernatural religion, and that it is therefore a Christian’s duty, not merely to avoid grave sin – which good pagans also do – but to rise above a mere natural standard of conduct. He does not understand that his position – as made clear by his attack on mine – is a radical denial of the whole supernatural order.

Again, Jansenism

We have already seen that the fundamental error of the Jansenists is their denial of the supernatural order. Again, therefore, we find the critic’s position akin to that of the very heretics with whom he wishes to associate *Applied Christianity*. By denying the doctrine set forth in the book, he falls into the error that he falsely charges me with. Here is how his error comes about.

The Jansenists believed that all good works, and the whole economy of grace, are directed, not to a supernatural plan and purpose, the very existence of which they denied, but to overcoming what they considered to be the radical corruption of human nature. As a consequence, they taught that all suffering and penance was expiatory. Thus Baius held (and he was of course condemned for teaching it):

“All the afflictions of just men are a punishment for their sins;
hence Job and the martyrs, underwent all that they suffered on

account of their sins.” (D. B. 1072)

A similar proposition of Quesnel was condemned:

“God never afflicts the innocent: and afflictions always serve either to punish sin or to purify the sinner.” (D. B. 1420)

This is the same as saying that all the works of penance, all self-denials, all crosses, are performed on account of sin. And this is what my critic must believe – it is his only alternative – if he objects to my saying that there is besides sin, another, a more positive, and a prior reason for mortification, for renunciation in the Christian life: that reason being God’s plan to endow us with supernatural happiness.

In a word, there is another purpose in the afflictions God sends to us, another purpose behind the law that we are to mortify ourselves, to renounce the pleasures of the earth, and to sacrifice mere human desires. That purpose is revealed in the fact that by grace we have been deified, that is, raised to a plane of living higher than that of nature: an elevation which requires that we relinquish our attachment for the ambitions, the goods, the destiny of the natural man. The Jansenists, however, deny this, because they deny the existence of the supernatural order and see in grace and all salutary actions only a means to overcome sin. My critic, by refusing to concede to the works of penance any value or purpose aside from satisfaction for sin, is led, at least in practice, to that denial of the supernatural which such a belief proceeds from and involves. You cannot attack truth without falling into error.

The Teaching of the Angelic Doctor

This double aspect of the Christian life, this twofold purpose of all good works, particularly of those which contain an element of sacrifice, is brought out by St. Thomas in an article (I II, 87, 7) in which he addresses to himself this question: “Is every penalty (*pœna*) to be attributed to some guilt?”

Of course, under the word “penalty” we must include, not only afflictions which come directly from Providence, but also the self-imposed penalties which are called penances. For the immediate purposes and effect are the same for both kinds, i.e., to separate men from some human good, such as health, pleasure, money, reputation. The difference between them is that, in the one case, God obtains this effect by our voluntary obedience to His law, while in the other, He mortifies us through natural causes or through the actions of our fellow-creatures. Thus St. Thomas’s answer to the question he has thus prepared for

himself will include all the penalties of life, whether generously undertaken or patiently endured. And we ask, with him, “Are all such penalties to be considered as punishment for guilt?”

The saint answers, in the first place, that some of life’s penalties are of course punishment for sin – punishment in the strict sense of the word, imposed on us by God because of sin, whether original or actual.

Another Purpose of Our Good Works

But he goes on to explain that there are other sacrifices required of us, which while bearing a somewhat penal character, are not in a true or strict sense to be considered penal, i.e., penalties for sin. Here we see that as the word *penance* is used in a particular sense, in which it is strictly connected with sin, but also in a broader sense to include all the works of self-denial, so the word *penalty*, closely related to *penance*, is used in two parallel meanings, i.e., as a punishment for sin, and as a general word for all works of sacrifice and self-denial.

What, then, is the nature of these works which, bearing something of the character of penalties, are nevertheless not true penalties? Since there are several kinds of temporal goods, answers St. Thomas, it may happen that a man will suffer loss in one kind of goods in order to obtain an increase in another and higher kind. For example, one may willingly bear financial loss in order to regain his health; or, again, he may bear the loss of both money and health to promote the salvation of his soul and to glorify God.

That such actions, in which temporal goods are sacrificed to gain a supernatural advantage, are not purely and simply punishment for sins, is clear from several considerations. For one thing, punishment is a pure loss (*privatio*), and therefore, an evil to be suffered. But in the cases we are considering, the loss is only incidental to a higher gain. It is not purely and simply an evil; therefore it is not purely and simply a punishment. Indeed, says Silvius, commenting on this teaching, such a loss is “neither an evil, nor a punishment, but is rather a benefit, *neque est malum neque pœna, sed est beneficium*.” (I II, 48, 5)

Furthermore, in these actions the *motive* is not to satisfy for sin (although this may be done at the same time), but rather to gain some higher good. In other words, the *raison d’être* of these works is positive rather than negative. In the words of Silvius again, they are performed, “not because of sin, but for other reasons, *non immituntur propter peccatum, sed propter alias causas*.” What are those other, positive purposes? According to St. Thomas, the salvation of the soul and the glory of God. Silvius, lucid commentator on St. Thomas, expands this by

observing that these works may be a precaution against the future, a means of proving patience and the other virtues, of setting an example as in the case of Job and Tobias, and, finally, of increasing in merit and of rendering glory to God. (*loc. cit.*)

The Medicinal Penalties

Nevertheless, this second class of works, although positive in purpose, contains a negative element: those works involve hardship, pain, difficulty – a going against nature. For this reason they have in some measure the features of poenal works. The significance of this fact may be seen when it is remembered that man's very capacity to suffer hardship and pain, and his condemnation to a life of labor, are themselves effects of original sin. So that, in some way, although only "remotely and indirectly," the poenal element of these works is a consequence of original sin. On the other end, the purely positive element of these works – the practice of virtue and the duty to love God above all things – antedates the Fall and was demanded from the very beginning, by man's elevation to the supernatural plane.

In connecting these works with the Fall it is to be observed, therefore, that they are not, strictly speaking, a punishment for original sin. For one thing, in distinguishing these works, St. Thomas at once marks them off clearly from punishments strictly so-called, whether for actual or original sin. Furthermore, the Church has condemned a Jansenistic teaching which maintained that we should do penance all our lives for original sin. It is, therefore, only the poenal character of these works that is to be traced to original sin; that is, they are traceable to original sin "inasmuch as it was through this sin that men became subject to all the tribulations and afflictions which come upon them." (Silvius, *loc. cit.*)

Among the consequences of this sin was the loss of the preternatural gifts, among others impassibility and freedom from concupiscence, a loss which has made even the positive works of virtue difficult and laborious, i. e., in a certain sense, poenal. The loss of those gifts allows the downward pull of our sensible life to assert itself, thus making arduous the practice of virtue and the choice of spiritual things over temporal.

These penalties of positive purpose St. Thomas calls *medicinal*, thereby distinguishing them from those which are directly in punishment for sin. This name, besides being useful to identify the good works of the second category, reminds us that, in the state of fallen nature, all good works involve a certain hardship, and therefore, besides their positive ends, serve at the same time to overcome the infection of

concupiscence. The downward pull of our Fallen nature must be countered by deliberate efforts to rise upwards. In a word, there is need, if we are to perform the good works necessary for our salvation, that a remedy be provided for our fallen nature, to restore it to health: can a sick man perform the labors undertaken by a man in good health? And so these works by helping us to overcome our reluctance to “seek the things that are above,” are well called medicinal, “not as merely diminishing but as removing altogether their pœnal character, *non tantum diminuens sed etiam tollens veram rationem pœnae*,” except in the sense already noted. (Salamenticenses, I II, 87, 7)

The State of Original Justice

St. Thomas throws further light on the nature of medicinal works, by contrasting man in his present state with his condition before the Fall. He says:

“In the state of innocence, it would not have been necessary to induce anyone to progress in virtue by pœnal exercises: hence what is pœnal in such works is to be attributed to original sin.”
(*loc. cit.*)

Notice that he does not say that the necessity of practicing virtue and of doing good works is to be attributed to original sin. Only their pœnal aspect. Quite apart from sin – even before there was sin on this earth – Adam and Eve were required, because of their elevation to the supernatural order, to practice the virtues, to observe the divine law, to exercise themselves in faith, hope and charity. They were expected, as shown by their trial, to accept God’s word in faith rather than live by their merely natural reason; to obey Him rather than follow their merely natural will; to love Him above all things, with their whole heart and soul, mind and strength.

Their state gives us an insight into the purely positive character of virtue, into virtue that lacks even the medicinal element. It shows us, too, that our adoptive sonship, which is akin to theirs – quite apart from sin, even apart from original sin – requires of us also an exercise of positive supernatural virtue, especially of that love which prefers God above all and chooses Him as End and Beatitude.

Love and Sacrifice

For Adam and Eve, of course, unimpeded as they were by unruly concupiscence, and immune from pain by the gift of impassibility, the practice of virtue was vastly easier than for us. But it would not exempt

them from the practice of self-sacrifice. Wherever there is love there is sacrifice. Accordingly, they, too, were under the necessity of sacrificing a merely natural destiny and beatitude. They, too, had to renounce things lower for things higher, things natural for things supernatural, things good for things holy, things human for things divine.

The reason for this is that love of itself demands sacrifice. Love is the culminating act of the will, and every act of the will requires a choice of one thing, an exclusion of everything else.

“Every act of the will is an act of self-limitation. In that sense every act is an act of self-sacrifice. When you choose anything, you reject everything else... Every act is an irrevocable selection and exclusion. Just as when you marry one woman you give up all the others, so when you take up one course of action, you give up all the other courses. If you become King of England, you give up the post of Beadle in Brompton. If you go to Rome you sacrifice a rich suggestive life in Wimbledon.” (G. K. Chesterton: *Orthodoxy*, Ch. III)

Let us add: If you become a spouse of the Holy Spirit, you choose Him before all things else. If you become a son of God, you cease being a mere creature of the earth. If you aspire to reach heaven, you renounce the primrose path of the pagans.

How We Differ From Our First Parents

This was for Adam and Eve as for us. The difference is that, in the state of innocence, sacrifice was in a certain sense easy. Not easy in the sense that it lacked all difficulty; since we know that our first parents, in spite of their great gifts, failed in the sacrifice asked of them. But easy because, being in no sense and in no degree an evil resulting from sin, theirs were the sacrifices of love – willing, eager, joyful. What love does, it does willingly; and to love, all things are easy. The sacrifices of Adam and Eve were easy also because they were not hindered by concupiscence, did not have to overcome their earthward momentum.

We can now distinguish three aspects in the sacrificial element of good works. For one thing, as in the case of Adam and Eve, there is the sacrifice demanded by love, and having no relation whatever to sin. Then, with us, there is the medicinal aspect of good works, an aspect that is present even in the most positive exercise of virtue and love; and this, “at least remotely, consequently, and indirectly” (Silvius) is to be traced to the Fall. Finally, there are the sacrifices imposed as punishment for sin, satisfactions strictly so-called.

Of course, in reality, these three aspects are inseparable: all three are, in varying proportions, in every good work. When I fast, for example, I perform a positive act of preference for God above creatures: at the same time I apply a remedy to my concupiscence; finally, I offer satisfaction for my sins. Every work is at once meritorious, medicinal, and pœnal. We distinguish them because it is the method and need of our reason to analyze and divide in order to understand. And it is profitable in this case to do so. We solidify our convictions, gain new motives for seeking to advance in virtue, learn the practical exigencies of our elevation to the supernatural state, and come to appreciate more fully the necessity of having to follow Jesus on the way of the cross.

The Teaching of Saint Francis de Sales

St. Francis de Sales, even when dealing with men in their fallen state, prefers to keep his attention fixed on the positive side of virtue and of spiritual effort. Without neglecting to consider the effects of the Fall – quite the contrary – but in order to hold up the highest possible motivation to us, he rather focuses his attention on the positive supernatural end of human life, deriving from this end (rather than from the consideration of sin and its effects), the necessity to practice virtue, to seek after perfection, to sacrifice all for God.

For example, he writes:

“Man is the perfection of the universe.; the spirit is the perfection of man; love, that of the spirit; and charity, that of love. Wherefore the love of God is the end, the perfection, and the excellence of the universe. In this, Theotimus, consists the greatness and the primacy of the Commandment of divine love, which the Saviour calls the first and greatest Commandment.”
(*Love of God*, X, 1)

He further sees a mystical death to self as the practical consequence of this love. Thus, explaining the Apostle’s word, “For you are dead...” (Col. 3, 3), he observes:

“It is as though you no longer live in yourselves nor in the limits of your natural condition; your soul does not now live according to herself but above herself. The true nature of the phoenix lies in this, that by the help of the sunbeams, she annihilates her own life, to have a life more desirable and vigorous, hiding as it were, her life under ashes. Silkworms change their being, and from worms become butterflies; bees are born worms, then become nymphs crawling on their feet, and at last they become

flying bees. We do the same, Theotimus, if we are spiritual: for we forsake our *natural* life to live a more eminent life above ourselves, hiding all this new life in God with Christ Jesus..." (*Ibid.*, VII, 6)

Finally, he tells what this practice of love requires in the most concrete terms:

"The love of benevolence, then, causes in us a desire, more and more to increase the complacency which we take in the divine goodness; and to effect this increase the soul sedulously deprives herself of all other pleasures that she may give herself more entirely to taking pleasure in God." (*Ibid.*, V, 7)⁹

The Fundamental Truth

One thing remains to be done: I must show, not only that there is another reason, besides sin, why Christians must die to the natural man, but also that this other reason is *prior*, that it is primary. This, it will be recalled, is part of the doctrine to which my critic objects, part of the doctrine which he says is contrary to the common teaching of theologians. In demonstrating the truth of my statement, I will also be describing the foundation of this whole doctrine.

I observe, then, that there are two aspects to our justification, two elements in our sanctification. And while in actual life both aspects or elements are joined together inseparably, like the upper side and under side of a material object, still they are distinct; and each aspect has its own implications, makes its own demands, carries its own duties.

"Justification, therefore, has both a negative and a positive element. The positive element is interior sanctification through the merits of Jesus Christ. The negative element consists in the forgiveness of sin. Though these elements are objectively inseparable, *the forgiveness of sin being, practically an effect of interior sanctification*, yet we must treat them separately..." (Pohle, *Grace, Actual and Habitual*, page 301)

I have underlined these words to indicate that the negative element in our sanctification, that which pertains to sin, is a consequence of our

9. Obviously, the death to nature that is herein spoken of is moral and spiritual: i.e., it does not mean that nature is renounced physically or ontologically. We always remain substantially human, but are divinized in the principle and motivation of our actions.

positive sanctification. It is this positive sanctification, this elevation to the supernatural state as sons of God, that is primary in God's plan. Sin is but a contingent element. In fact, sin cannot strictly speaking be held to be part of God's plan at all. It is man's idea, his contribution to God's universe. But He permitted it, allowed for it in his eternal plans, circumvented it in His scheme of salvation.

This is clear in the case of the angels and of Adam and Eve. There was, at first, no sin in them. Yet God, having raised them to the supernatural state, demanded of them a great sacrifice, a great mortification. God asked of them to renounce their own natural intelligence and will and obey Him blindly. It was a kind of mystical death to their natural powers: it was a mortification. True, as we have seen, the angels and our first parents did not experience the downward drag of concupiscence, which makes mortification doubly difficult for us. But that their trial was real and difficult is clear from the fact that Adam and Eve failed in it and only part of the angels succeeded. Indeed, for us still today, the most difficult renunciation of all is, not to give up the pleasures of the earth, but to sacrifice our own judgment and will by faith and obedience. St. Gregory, in one of the homilies of the Breviary, says that it is relatively easy to give up other things; the most difficult sacrifice is to deny ourselves.

Therefore, the *primary* reason for all our renunciations, all our works of penance, is, not that we are sinners, but that, having been raised to a supernatural state, we should rise above and abandon mere human desires, mere human standards of conduct, a mere human notion of happiness. This positive sanctification and superelevation above nature is the central thing in God's plan. The negative element, the remission of sins, is its effect; and since a cause is prior to its effect (in the order of nature, although not perhaps in the order of time), there can be no doubt which element of our sanctification is prior. (I II, 113, 8) Elsewhere (I, 95, 4) the Angelic Doctor summarizes the whole matter admirably when he says:

“It is to be observed that man needs grace [and of course this includes the good works that are performed under the impulse of grace] for more reasons after sin than before; although his need is not greater, *post peccatum ad plura indiget gratia quam ante peccatum, sed non magis*. For even prior to sin man needed grace to obtain eternal life, and this is *the principal reason, principalis necessitas, why grace is necessary*. But after sin, man needs grace, besides this, for the remission of his sins and for sustaining him in his weakness.”

Conclusion

Such is the doctrine that my critic directly attacks in *Weapons of the Spirit* and, by several of his Particular Comments, in *Applied Christianity*. This is the doctrine which, he says, is contrary to the common teaching of theologians. He gives no citations to prove this; so that I cannot tell whether the theologians he has in mind are greater than the ones I have been citing!

In point of fact, as already noticed, the only theologians who deny it are of the Jansenistic school. Their errors have been quoted above, and Silvius, commenting on the article of St. Thomas that has just been explained, confirms the statement that the reason for their condemnation was that they rejected the very truth that my critic attacks. Their doctrine, that all afflictions are on account of sin, issued, like all their teachings, from their rejection of the supernatural order. Of itself it involves a denial of the supernatural order, for it rejects the specifically supernatural quality of merit. It holds that all works of mortification are of value only to enable the soul to overcome sin, not to merit sanctifying and elevating grace.

The error touches even the persons of Jesus and Mary. As to the former, it would allow that His sufferings are only a vicarious atonement and did not merit our elevation to the supernatural plane. In the case of Our Lady, the Jansenists, with logical consistency, attributed her sufferings to her “sinfulness.” My critic could escape this difficulty by explaining her sufferings also as vicarious atonement. But he could not escape – if he really wishes to remain in this untenable position – he could not avoid depriving her of meriting, through her sorrows, ever new increases of grace in her own life. For the effects of this doctrine, see the Commentary of Silvius I II, 48, 5)

Thus my critic is led, by his zeal, into a number of errors wholly incompatible with Catholicism. You cannot attack truth without falling into error.

Chapter V

Exaggerated Supernaturalism

That his accusations are often contradictory does not, as we have seen, prevent my critic from making them. Thus the fact that he charges me with Jansenism, which involves a denial of the supernatural order, does not hinder him, in some of his Particular Comments, from accusing me of exaggerating the supernatural obligations of Christians. My critic apparently does not see that the charges of Jansenism and exaggerated supernaturalism cancel one another.

He states the latter objection as follows:

page 77. “We can be both natural and supernatural, because grace builds on nature. Thus, a man can be at the same time a soldier and a general, because, the latter is built on the former.”

page 29. (Part III) “It is impossible to be in the air and on land at the same time: but in our present condition we are in both the natural and the supernatural sphere. The two are not mutually exclusive. Error I.” [The references are to the old mimeographed edition.]

In presenting these objections, my critic does not indicate any particular words of *Applied Christianity* as “erroneous,” but the drift of his thoughts is clear. In trying to bring out our supernatural obligations, the book regularly employs two expressions, both of which my critic finds objectionable, not only in these Comments, but also in others which we have already considered. The two modes of speech are:

a. It is said that we must rise above nature. Hence the airplane example: to ride in an airplane means that we must leave the earth; so, to live in the supernatural, we must rise above mere natural standards of living. My critic, forgetful that this is a mere analogy, insists on interpreting it rigorously, accuses me of asserting that, to live supernatural lives, we must abandon *our nature*. Nowhere do I say such a thing. I say clearly that we keep our nature, but that we are to rise above mere *natural norms of conduct*.

b. In *Applied Christianity* it is said that we must die to nature, that we must mortify it, even that we must annihilate it. My critic absurdly interprets this as meaning that we must destroy our nature physically – or ontologically, to use a word which he

favours; hence his insistence that we are natural and supernatural at the same time.

Now this mode of speech – which can of course be misconstrued by one determined to do so – is entirely in accord with the conventional language of Christian spirituality. I shall illustrate this fact more fully in a moment. For the present, the reader may recall passages which have already been quoted from St. Francis de Sales in which both expressions are employed. Thus in Chapter III, #3, the Saint has been quoted at length, describing how the supernatural life carries us “out of and above ourselves... a perpetual rapture and continual ecstasy of action and operation.” In the same Chapter (III, #9), the example of the phoenix, which also offends my critic, is quoted from *The Treatise on the Love of God*. It illustrates the second mode of expression, i.e., that to possess supernatural life we must die to nature. (See also the longer citations from St. Francis, in Chapter IV, on this same point.)

The Explanation

The explanation of this difficulty is really quite simple, and, in technical language, can be expressed shortly: Ontologically, or physically, our natures and their natural activity remain the same ever after our elevation to the supernatural plane. In this sense it is true, as my critic says, that we remain natural and supernatural at the same time. From this point of view, therefore, it would be false – in truth an exaggerated supernaturalism – to speak of renouncing our natures. Our renunciation of mere natural goods or norms of conduct – never of nature itself or of natural activity – as well as our death to nature, is to be understood *morally*, that is, as applying primarily to the moral order, and therefore as being consummated *in the will*. Hence, such a renunciation of natural goods or such a death to mere natural desires does not in the least imply that nature itself or natural activity is to be abandoned. It implies nothing beyond that in the will there is to be an entire conversion of our affections to God. In this sense, such language has been used from the time of Christ Himself by all Christian writers. The will’s renunciation of itself, of mere natural inclinations, attachments, and norms of conduct is so painful as to be a kind of death: what spiritual writers call mystical death.

But, perhaps, it will be said, this distinction is not made sufficiently clear in *Applied Christianity*. It is true that I do not use such technical expressions as *ontological* or *moral*, for reasons already sufficiently explained, but certainly the doctrinal issues are given clearly enough. In fact, one entire chapter was inserted at the beginning of the book to explain this very matter. It is a rather technical chapter (Part I, Chapter 3)

but was given a place of prominence so that there would be no possibility of such misunderstandings arising. That they have arisen nevertheless in the mind of my critic results (aside from his sin-mentality) from his refusal to understand statements made in one part of the book in relation to other parts which modify or complete them, and, above all, from his failure to view all the teachings of *Applied Christianity* as a whole.

Human beings are under the common necessity, even when they are able to view a subject as a unity, of speaking their ideas one at a time. Writers also labor under that limitation; and they must rely on the patience and good will of readers to grasp statements in their various connections with one another and in their total effect. Even if it were true that isolated expressions in *Applied Christianity*, considered by themselves, are open to misconstruction (*dato, non concessio*) it is anything but true when these expressions are taken up in conjunction with the doctrinal explanation which was explicitly given that they might be understood aright.

Thus in the chapter referred to it is said that the task of the Christian is to mortify, not sin only, but nature. Then it is laid down that this death or mortification to nature is not to be understood of:

- a. Nature itself: which is substantially good and therefore not in any way to be injured or mortified.
- b. Natural Activity: which proceeding from nature, is also good, and therefore not to be mortified.
- c. Reason, which is also good, and which therefore is not to be mortified or violated by abandoning natural truth or by adopting devotional or personal eccentricities.

To make these points clear, various illustrations are given. Thus it is said that the action of grace and charity – that is, of the supernatural – on nature is like the action of fire on steel. The steel is transformed and rendered pliable, but remains steel. So also human nature and human life is transformed by grace while remaining human. Could there be a clearer statement that, in the ontological sense, we are natural and supernatural at the same time? How then can my critic claim that I deny or ignore this truth?

Again, the example (given by St. Francis de Sales in this very matter) of a branch being grafted to a tree, is used to show how our natural activity is to be grafted on to grace to bring forth works which, while remaining in themselves human, are animated by divine life. Could there be any clearer statement that natural activity, in its *physical* make-up, is not to be injured, or mortified, or abandoned?

Then having shown in this chapter, in what sense (i.e., the physical or ontological sense) nature is *not* to be mortified, the following chapter is devoted to inquiring in what sense nature *is* to be mortified. And the answer there given is that this mortification is to take place *in the will* by ridding ourselves of such natural motives as are stained with selfishness or sensuality, by ridding ourselves of merely natural attachments for creatures, and, finally, by elevating and transforming even good natural motives, thereby directing all our activity to God.

In other words, these two chapters set forth both aspects of the truth under consideration, i.e., that nature is not to be injured or abandoned ontologically, but that its goods, insofar as they are merely natural, are to be renounced interiorly by the will, i.e., morally or spiritually. Observe: this is not put down here as an after-thought; it was already in the very beginning of the book.

But may this moral renunciation of merely natural norms of conduct, of merely natural motives and attachments to creatures, be appropriately described as a death? St. Francis de Sales thinks so, thus explaining how the will is dead to itself:

“True it is, our will can no more die than our soul, yet does it sometimes go out of the limits of its ordinary life, to live totally in the divine will. This is when it neither wills nor cares to desire anything at all, but gives itself ever totally and without reserve to the good pleasure of Divine Providence, so mingling and saturating itself with this good pleasure that itself is seen no more, but is all hidden with Jesus Christ in God, where it lives, not it, but the will of God lives in it. (*Love of God*, IX, 13)

The saint elsewhere shows how far this mystical death to self and to nature will go in him who truly loves God.

“‘Love is strong as death’ (*Cant.* VIII, 6). Death separates the soul of him who dies from the body, and from all the things of the world; sacred love separates the soul of the lover from his body and from all things of the world: nor is there any other difference, saying that death does that in effect, which love ordinarily does only in affection. I say ordinarily, Theotimus, because holy love is sometimes so violent that it even actually causes a separation between the body and the soul; making the lovers die a most happy death, better than a hundred lives.” (*Ibid.*, VII, 9)

The dignity of St. Francis de Sales as a Doctor of the Church is suffi-

cient warrant that this is no private theory but the traditional teaching of the Church. Actually, both the teaching and the mode of expression come from Jesus Himself:

“Amen, amen, I say to you, unless the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remains alone. But if it die, it brings forth much fruit. He who loves his life, loses it; and he who hates his life in this world, keeps it unto life everlasting.” (John 12, 24-25)

St. Paul recurs to the same thought innumerable times; for him the correlated ideas of death and resurrection have a twofold significance: they express the transforming power of grace, which makes us a “new creature”; they show that, as a consequence, Christians are called to a new and an altogether higher mode of life. From many texts, we may note in particular the following:

“For we are buried together with Him by baptism into death; that as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life.” (Rom. 6, 4)

“Mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth. For you are dead; and your life is hid with Christ in God.” (Col. 3, 2-3)

“For the charity of Christ holdeth us, *urget nos!* judging this, that if one died for all, then all were dead.” (II Cor. 5, 14)

It is in explaining those last two texts that St. Francis de Sales develops his own teaching on this mystical death – a death which, as we have seen, brings about a detachment so complete that it already accomplishes in the affections what physical death only brings about in effect. (*Op. cit.*, VII, 6-14; IX, 13-16)

“Let us behold Him, Theotimus, this heavenly Redeemer, extended upon the cross as upon a funeral pyre of honor, where He dies of love for us... Ah, why do we not spiritually cast ourselves upon Him to die upon the Cross with Him, who has truly willed to die for love of us?... I will die with Him and burn in the flames of His love, one and the same fire shall consume this divine Creator and His poor creature. My Jesus is wholly mine, and I am wholly His: I will live and die upon His breast, nor life nor death shall ever separate me from Him. Thus then is made the holy ecstasy of true love, when we live *not* according to human reason and inclinations, but above them, following the inspirations and instincts of the divine Saviour of Our Souls.”

(*Ibid.*, VII, 8)

It is well worth observing that in none of the places given, whether in the Scriptural texts, or in the many chapters which St. Francis de Sales devotes to the subject, is there any mention of the distinction between *ontological* and *moral* death to nature. This is the explanation of philosophy, useful and even necessary to keep teachers from going astray, but of no value for devotional literature. The mere absurdity of understanding death to nature in an ontological sense is sufficient reason for the impossibility of such a position. Thus, when St. Paul tells us to “put off the old man” (Eph. 4, 22), he does not add: “But I mean this to be taken morally and spiritually, not ontologically and physically.” He does not find it necessary to make this explanation. Or when he says, “I die daily” (I Cor. 15, 31), he does not think it necessary to add, “But this is only a moral death.” He felt reasonably sure, no doubt, that most people would understand that his daily death to self was not ontological. But perhaps he was too sanguine: did we not know the authorship of those words, might not one see in them a *dangerous tendency* to exaggerated supernaturalism or an attack on nature – possibly even an “implication,” that their author believes in a plurality of lives for each individual or in the transmigration of souls?



Obviously, pious naturalism cannot admit, in any sense, that we are to rise above nature, that we are to purify and fortify nature, that, in a word, we are to die to nature. For this school of piety it is sufficient to live in accord with nature. Its protagonists use the theological axiom, “Grace perfects nature and does not destroy it,” for their own purposes, i.e., to defend and exalt nature, and to *prevent* any mortification of it. They use the terms of Christian theology, but in the accurate description of Father Garrigou-Lagrange, already quoted, they are “more attentive to nature which must be perfected than to grace which should effect this transformation in us.” For them it is perfection enough to live in accord with reason – with, of course, some decorative liturgical adjuncts and system of sacraments whose only purpose, they think, is to assist them in this. “Furthermore, considering nature as it actually is since original sin, they will not sufficiently distinguish in nature what is essential and good, what ought to be perfected, from what ought to be mortified: egoism under all its forms gross or subtle.” No, accepting nature as the final norm of sanctity, and taking nature simply as it is, pious naturalism then *sanctifies* even the wayward tendencies of nature, concupiscences, that which

ought to be mortified: egoism in all its forms, gross or subtle.

In such piety, detachment, penance, the cross becomes meaningless. Rise above nature? But that, it says, is exaggerated supernaturalism! Purify nature? That smacks of the ancient heresy of the Manichees! Mortify or die to nature? Such language is Jansenistic! Thus with a fine gesture of theological learning, the whole tradition of authentic Christian spirituality is outlawed and proscribed by a school which, smugly claiming to speak of Christ, in fact bars from its purely natural system of principles all the high distinctive ideals of the Gospel. They have – say the defenders of this system of “spiritual quackery,” to use Faber’s phrase – adjusted Christianity to the requirements of our age of human nature. They have achieved a marvelous compromise between Christianity on the one hand and the world and the flesh on the other. They have perfected a Christianity without the cross. They have produced a nauseous brew of religious mediocrity, tepidity and hypocrisy: nauseous even to the enemies of Christ, nauseous to all except themselves – and the devil.

Their ideal of conduct, in its purest form (the grosser forms are far more common), is that of the humanists, according to which perfection is achieved by the unhampered exercise of all the natural powers, by the realization of every natural good, by the fulfillment here on earth of all the aspirations and promises of human life. At the same time of course, they keep every essential element in Christianity – except the cross! They point out that Christianity is humanistic – that the Son of God Himself took up a human nature. Only, alas, they do not distinguish between what Maritain well calls anthropocentric humanism, which is that of paganism, and Christocentric humanism, which is that of Christianity. They do not understand that Christian humanism is the humanism of the Incarnation: not the humanism in which human powers are exploited for merely human ends, but the humanism in which our humanity is raised up to become a sharer in the divinity of Him, who took on our human nature precisely to effect such a deification in us. They forget that the practical consequence of this humanism of the Incarnation is that we should “*mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth; for we are dead and our life is hid with Christ in God.*” (Col. 3, 2)

Above all, they forget – these theologians of pious naturalism – they forget that this immaculate humanity of Jesus with its unique perfection – bodily, mental, and moral – achieved its great purpose, not by fulfilling all the vast promise of its marvelous human powers, but rather by renouncing them: by an entire life that was “a cross and a martyrdom,” by

a death that disfigured and destroyed His wonderful humanity, making Him resemble, as the prophet said, a “worm and no man.”

For us the humanism of the Incarnation means the same thing. We, the followers of Jesus, are invited to drink of the chalice that He drank of, to be baptized with the baptism wherewith He was baptized. Whatever pious naturalism may say, there is no Christianity without the cross. “Through many tribulations we must enter into the Kingdom of God.” (Acts 14, 21) “He that seeks not the Cross of Christ, seeks not the glory of Christ.” (St. John of the Cross)

Let us close by contemplating this mystery of the cross with Newman. He is speaking of Callista, who, at once in classic beauty of bodily form, as also, and above all, in moral excellence and intellectual culture, represented to him the highest type of humanity produced by Greek civilization. He is brooding over her broken and mangled body – for she has just suffered martyrdom for the love of Jesus Christ – and he says:

“O why should the great Creator shatter one of His most admirable works! If the order of the sun and the stars is adorable, if the laws by which earth and sea are kept together mark the Hand of supreme Wisdom and Power, how much nobler perfection of beauty is manifested in man! And of human nature itself here was the supereminent crown, a soul full of gifts, full of greatness, full of intellect, placed in an outward form equally surpassing in its kind, and still more surpassingly excellent from its intimate union and subordination to the soul, so as almost to be its simple expression; yet this choicest, rarest specimen of Almighty skill, the Almighty has pitilessly shattered, in order that it might inherit a higher, an eternal perfection. O mystery of mysteries, that heaven should not possibly be obtained without such grinding down and breaking up of our original nature! O mysterious, that principle in us, whatever it is, and however it came there, which is so antagonistic to God, which has so spoilt what seems to be good, that all must be undone, and must begin anew! ‘An enemy hath done this;’ and, knowing as much as this, and no more, we must leave the awful mystery to that day when all things shall be made light.”

Woe to you lawyers, for you have taken away the key
of knowledge. You yourselves have not entered in:
and those that were entering in, you have hindered.
(Luke, 11, 52)

**NATURE AND THE
SUPERNATURAL
Continued**

A further reply to more criticisms.

By Father John J. Hugo

A Reply To The Ecclesiastical Review



Gaude Maria Virgo: cunctas hæreses
sola interemisti in universo mundo.

Contents

I Introductory:
 The Battle of the Cardboard Soldiersp. 126

II The Criticismsp. 129

 § 1. A Lesson in Logicp. 129

 § 2. The Theology of Pious Naturalismp. 137

 § 3. Food for the Dogsp. 156

 § 4. Eat, Drink, and Carry your Crossp. 161

 § 5. Confusion Continuedp. 169

 § 6. Zealous for the Lesser Thingsp. 175

 § 7. Heresy Huntp. 182

III The Spirit and Method of the Attackp. 190

 § 1. The Spirit of the Attack.....p. 190

 § 2. The Second Lesson in Logic.....p. 192

IV The Misconcept of Sacred Theology,p. 196

 § 1. Ever Learning, Never Attaining to the Knowledge of the Truth..p. 196

 §2. The Impoverishment of Moral Theologyp. 206

Typed and Duplicated
by the Author.
]1946?]

“For there shall be a time when they will not endure sound doctrine”
(2 Tim., 4, 3.)

I

INTRODUCTORY

The Battle of the Cardboard Soldiers

Some time ago I found it necessary to explain and defend the principles set forth in my book *Applied Christianity* against certain charges of false doctrine made by a Critic in the *Ecclesiastical Review*. Now, as the result of a new attack made in the same magazine¹⁰, I must undertake that task again. The charges made in this new criticism are less numerous and less serious than in the former one and can therefore be more easily and briefly considered.

There are some who may wonder why I continue this controversy. For their benefit I shall briefly set down my reasons. First, no loyal Catholic, certainly no priest, can remain silent under a charge of false or heretical doctrine. Even the saints, as Father Faber said, “who were silent under all other calumnies, would not for the most part rest quiet under the imputation of heresy.”¹¹ Secondly, according to the Critic’s own admission, many persons have accepted, whether through others or through me, the teachings of *Applied Christianity* and have made them the basis of their spiritual efforts. It is a duty that I owe to these persons, for their security of conscience and spiritual tranquillity, to vindicate the doctrines in which they have found at once spiritual strength and a firm basis for a more fervent service of God. Finally, to those who think that controversy destroys charity, I must say that Christians have a duty to truth as well as to charity: and if charity is in a sense more important than truth, being the final end and fruition of the Christian life, still truth is prior, is basic, is the source from which charity itself proceeds. To sacrifice truth for the sake of charity, would be ultimately to sacrifice charity itself. “In us as in the Word,” wrote Jacques Maritain, “love must proceed from truth, that is, from the spiritual possession of the truth in faith.” The *filioque* is a test of our charity as it is of our faith. In the present case I am conscious of no feelings towards my Adversaries that are out of harmony with Christian charity; yet I confess to a great indignation at their attack upon the truth; and, since attacking truth means falling into

10. See the issue of Jan., 1946. – The first attack appeared in July 1945; the answer to it is entitled, *Nature and the Supernatural, A Reply to Criticisms*.

11. *Growth in Holiness*, (New York, John Murphy Co.), p. 208.

error, also at the erroneous views of the spiritual life which these men, speaking from an eminent position, propose for the guidance of the faithful. Against such error, such an obscuring and impugning of the truth, I feel it a duty to combat with all the vigor at my command.



Before taking up the new charges in detail it seems useful to compare them with those of the former Critic, which I answered in *Nature and the Supernatural: a Reply to Criticisms*. Such a comparison reveals the following facts, which are not without significance:

First, while the former Critic's most damaging and pervasive charge was that of Jansenism, there is no mention of this heresy at all in the recent article. The accusation has been dropped suddenly and completely.

Secondly, the recent Critic seems less inclined to defend natural pleasures, especially those of clerical colleagues, for which the former Critic put up a truly valiant fight.

Thirdly, an old misrepresentation, made first against some of my associates, and repeated against me by the former Critic, has now been dropped entirely. It is that we demand an actual supernatural motive as a requirement for merit.

Thus, some progress seems to have been made, and I am led to hope that my first *Reply* was not wholly in vain. Not, however, that there is reason to be greatly elated over these results. Out of eight criticisms that I can distinguish in this new article, four were already made by the former Critic and answered in my first *Reply*; and although the Critic refers to this *Reply*, which leads to the presumption that he has read it, he makes no acknowledgment of these answers; he neither refutes nor dismisses them nor even adverts to them, but rather makes his statements, not only as though they had never been answered, but as though they had never even been made until he made them. In other words, he four times repeats the charges made by the former Critic, with but incidental variations.

Moreover, although he has dropped the charge of Jansenism, he has found, he thinks, clear evidence of another heresy: which the former Critic did not see at all, or at least did not mention, although he surely had ample opportunity to do so in the course of his five general, and one hundred twenty-eight particular, criticisms. The present Critic calls this new heresy an "incidental error"; without, however, explaining how

heresy can be “incidental” in a work of spiritual doctrine.

Finally, it must be said, that some of the Critic’s assaults are against, not the teachings of *Applied Christianity*, but certain errors that he wrongly attributes to the book, being related to it, however, only as misrepresentations or caricatures of its teaching. I had to notice, in the case of the former Critic, that my meaning and words were often subtly changed, in his restatements of them. The same is true of the present writer. Not that I would accuse these men of conscious dishonesty. The cause of the difficulty is to be found in the fact that their “sin mentality”, which I described in the first *Reply*, plays tricks on them, renders them simply unable to understand the quite different mentality of *Applied Christianity*, and causes them to interpret its words in terms of their own quite inaccurate thinking on the spiritual life; like the drunkard who concluded, after some strong cheese was put on his nose by pranksters, that the whole world is afoul.

Now I think that I am not claiming any extraordinary privilege in asking that I be allowed to state my own views and, in case of doubt, to interpret my own statements. If I say that I do or do not hold a certain view or teaching, should these Critics be allowed to contradict me to the extent of formulating my views for me, interpreting my statements, and attributing to me teachings or doctrines that I simply will not own? In controversy, this practice is akin to the game of setting up cardboard soldiers and then shooting them down. So my Critics set up errors, taken from source books and conveniently stated in their own words, and then shoot these cardboard soldiers down. They will find the principles in *Applied Christianity*, should they ever try to meet them, made of different stuff.

The Critic’s practice of shooting down errors of his own invention will be several times illustrated in the following pages. For the present, I mention only one. Certain words of mine are interpreted by the Critic¹² as a rejection of salutary actions. Now the former Critic had made exactly the same criticism and quoted the very same words. I answered his charges in two different parts of the first *Reply*. But the explanation that I give of my views is rejected; the Critic repeats the charge, puts *his own* interpretation on my words, and condemns me for the error which he himself has formulated. And behold, another cardboard soldier bites the dust! Let him lie: he feels no pain. I shall not meet this objection again, referring the interested reader to the first *Reply*.¹³ This will leave seven objections to be dealt with here, and I shall take them up one at a time,

12. *Ecclesiastical review*, January 1946, p. 67.

only changing their order slightly, for the sake of logical development, and considering also those that do but substantially repeat charges that were made once before and answered, in order to take cognizance of whatever variations they contain as well as to clarify the teachings of *Applied Christianity*.

II

The Criticisms

§ 1.

A Lesson in Logic.

The first criticism that we will consider concerns the meaning of nature. The Critic Cites the passage¹⁴ in which *Applied Christianity* distinguishes between pure nature, that is, nature in its essential properties, and nature in the concrete, that is, nature since the Fall; also the distinction between pure or right reason on the one hand, and, on the other, reason in the concrete, as it actually exists in a darkened state since the Fall. The book says that pure nature and pure right reason, are abstractions and do not actually exist, that is, do not in their pure and perfect form exist as concrete individual things.

The Critic objects to this doctrine and this mode of speech. Why? according to him, this would mean that pure nature and right reason are “for all practical purposes nonexistent”.¹⁵ Further, he asserts, in this teaching right reason becomes a “*mere* abstraction”, a “*nonexistent* abstraction”, an *unreal* and actually ineffective standard of right and wrong”.¹⁶

Now the reader will observe that none of the phrases that I have italicized, by which certain teachings are attributed to me, are to be found in the texts quoted from *Applied Christianity*. I said that reason and nature, considered in themselves, are abstractions, but I did not say that they are *mere* abstractions; nor did I say that abstractions are *unreal* or *nonex-*

13. See Chapter III, §§ 2 and 5.

14. *Op. cit.*, p. 62 [1946 edition].

15. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

istent. These are the Critic's thoughts; more of his cardboard soldiers; and, as we as we shall note, they certainly reveal a curious twist in his own thinking. I do not believe that abstractions are *unreal*, and hence I did not say so; I believe that they are very real. Nor do I believe that their reality is of inferior kind; hence I did not say that they are *mere* abstractions; nor did I say that abstractions are *nonexistent*, nor that nature and reason are non-existent abstractions. Such phrases reflect the Critic's mind, not that of the book.

To me an abstraction is real, or at any rate designates a reality. For example, in calling "humanity" an abstraction, which it is, I do not mean it is unreal or non-existent. It is real, although its reality is of a special kind, different from the reality of an individual concrete thing. The idea "humanity" exists, but its mode of existence is different from that of an individual man. You can see a man walk down the street; and you can, if you like, touch him or push him or speak to him. But you cannot see a "humanity" walk down the street; nor can you push or talk to a "humanity". Humanity is a universal idea which designates a universal essence common to all men but is fully exhausted or realized in no particular man; as a universal, it exists in the mental order, not in the extramental order of individual concrete men about us. It has concrete existence, or actuality, only in real individual men; but when it is found in individual men it is found, not in all the fullness that its idea conveys, but in a limited form, i.e., the humanity of Tom Green or Harry Brown.

It is the same way with human reason or pure human nature. To say they are abstractions is not at all to say that they are unreal or inferior or non-existent. It is simply to say that their reality and existence are of the kind belonging to universals, not the kind that belong to concrete, individual, *actually* existent men about us. When in daily life you come in contact with reason, it is not the pure reason or right reason of the philosophers; it is the particular, definitely limited, and not always right, reason of individual men and women.

So we are back to the controversies over Universals, so hotly argued in the Medieval Schools! I confess that I did not, in writing *Applied Christianity*, intend to engage in that controversy. I had thought that it was closed, at least so far as we Catholics are concerned. I had given my allegiance as a matter of course to the Aristotelian-Thomistic teaching sketched above, which holds that universals, while having their own kind of reality, do not actually exist as such, but have existence only in particular and restricted individuals who share in their universal nature. And now the Critic revives the ancient error of the Nominalists, who said that universal ideas are unreal and nonexistent, and tries to press it on

me. I fear that I cannot accept; I prefer the Thomistic school. But the reader will not fail to observe the curious Nominalistic twist in the thinking of the Critic, who, on the basis of a statement that pure right reason is an abstraction, concludes that it must therefore be unreal and nonexistent.

I had no thought of going into such technical distinctions, which are beyond the scope of *Applied Christianity*. My purpose was simply to make a workable distinction for the use of ordinary people in everyday living. It was not my intent, therefore, to observe all the formalities of philosophical language; although, on the other hand, I had no notion of departing from correct thinking in this matter. And whether one speaks in philosophical language or in the terms of ordinary speech, there is certainly a great difference between saying that a thing is not actually existent and that it is nonexistent. The word “actual” has a determining influence in the former clause. To say that a thing is nonexistent is to say that it is of the stuff of nothingness; to say that it does not actually exist is simply to state that it does not belong to the concrete, individual world of extramental reality.

In other words, right reason exists as any other universal and abstract idea or essence exists. It exists *actually* only in individuals, and there it is found always with individual limitations. Does the Critic know of anyone who possesses right reason in its fullness? Or is the reader acquainted with anyone who knows and acknowledges all the truths or right reason? When the Vatican Council said that the truths of faith do not conflict with those of reason it was of course speaking of right reason, universal reason, not the reason of any particular individual; for in individual cases, reason may and does conflict with faith. No doubt the Critic will say – he has said¹⁷ that it is error and not right reason that causes the conflict. *Concedo*. But that is just the point; in individuals reason is mixed with error; but they do not make any distinction between the truth and the falsehood in their own minds and in practice follow their errors under the delusion that these are reasonable. That is why there is a conflict between faith and reason *in the concrete*, that is, between faith and what the Scriptures call “the wisdom of the flesh”. As for right reason, of course there is no conflict between it and faith. The Critic did not need to go all the way to the Vatican Council for information on this point. He could have found the same doctrine in *Applied Christianity*! There it is said:

17. *Op. cit.*, p. 63.

“There is no discord between the natural truths of reason and the mysteries of faith. The truths of faith and those of reason belong to different orders, but they do not contradict each other; both come from God, Who is the very Truth, one and eternal.”¹⁸

When it is thus affirmed that reason is competent to discover truth, a truth that does not contradict faith, the reference is to the general reason of mankind, not to any individual’s reason: innumerable individuals, carrying on a tradition of rational inquiry, correcting and supplementing one another’s work, have established certain truths. No doubt these truths are available to individuals, who should also accept them. Yet to some, even to many, they are more or less inaccessible. For this reason, although the Vatican Council affirms the validity of reason as to natural religious truth, it was the teaching of St. Thomas, and has also come to be the ordinary teaching of the Church¹⁹, that a divine revelation is *morally necessary* in order that all men may quickly and without any admixture of error come to the knowledge even of natural religious truths. In other words reason by itself is not a sufficient guide: certainly not sufficient for the supernatural world, but not even fully sufficient in practice for the world of natural religious truth. Consequently, in contrasting theological knowledge, which is based on revelation, with that of philosophy, which is based on reason, Pope Pius IX said that while “nothing is more solid or stable than the former, as to the latter, which is explained and illustrated by human reason, nothing is more uncertain, since it varies according to the complexion of human minds (*“pro ingeniorum varietate”*) and is subject to innumerable fallacies and illusions.”²⁰

Contrast this statement of the Supreme Pontiff with the decree, quoted by the Critic, of the Vatican Council, to the effect that there can be no disagreement between faith and reason. Superficially they seem to be contradictory: actually, of course, they are not. The Vatican Council is talking about right reason, the general reason of mankind, or human reason in its perfection – an abstraction, which *in individuals* is found more or less – and oftener less than more. Pope Pius IX, however, is talking about the limitations of reason as found concretely in individuals, as is clear from his words concerning the variations among human minds.

Besides the limitations of individual human minds there is the added

18. *Applied Christianity*, p. 27 [p. 30 our edition].

19. Denzinger-Hannwart. *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 1642.

20. D. B., 1642.

and decisively important that our minds, in the concrete, have been wounded by original sin. Pope Pius IX, having spoken of the individual limitations of the mind, also speaks of this wound, against the rationalists, who (he says) have “certainly forgotten what a grave and deep (*acerbum*) wound was inflicted on human nature by the guilt of our first parents, so that *darkness has been spread over the mind* and the will has been made prone to evil.”²¹ Evidently, this being the case, we are not to expect to find right reason, in anything like its fullness or perfection, *in individuals*. It will be there, I say, more or less; and yet, all will hold on stubbornly to their own reason, and as experience shows, the stubbornness is likely to increase in inverse proportion to the rightness of the reason; that is, there is likely to be greater intellectual obstinacy, where there is less right reason. Accordingly, right reason will not often be found outside the rarefied atmosphere of a university lecture room. Philosophers speak of right reason; and I am far from saying that the concept is useless or unreal. But in actual life we meet not with right reason, but with reason at once limited and darkened. This knowledge is most necessary to confessors and directors of souls. They will not find right reason; they will find reason in the concrete, as it exists for example in Tom, Dick, and Harry. Perhaps Tom has ninety per cent right reason, and Dick has fifty per cent, while poor Harry is wholly sunk in sensuality. Each of them will find an actual conflict between the demands of faith and their own concrete, practical reason, which they follow in their daily lives. When Harry hears “Deny thyself and carry the cross,” it will conflict directly with the carnal wisdom that bids him eat, drink, and make good cheer. Dick, a respectable and prosperous fellow, will find a conflict between his bourgeois mentality, with its worship of the rich and of material prosperity, and the Gospel injunctions to love poverty and give to the poor. Tom, despite his moral and intellectual uprightness, will also feel the conflict: he will find many “hard sayings” among the words of Our Lord, especially among those that speak of detachment, poverty of spirit, and the need of dying to self. indeed, Tom, for all the relative rightness of his reason, may find the conflict more bitter, although in the secret recesses of his soul, than do the others; for the attachment that he will have, almost unavoidably, for the very rightness of his reason will make it all the more difficult for him to submit to the necessity of *becoming a fool that he may be wise*. (I Cor. 3, 18).

These remarks will make it clear, I hope, that the issue involved in this question, which at first sight may appear academic, is in reality vital.

21. D. B., 1643.

What is involved is the practical basis of spiritual direction. If priests expect to find right reason realized in individuals, they are dreaming about the state of pure nature, which might have been but never was, or of integral nature, which once was but is now no longer. Such priests are not competent to deal with the actual state of things that they will find; they are not ready to direct souls in the actual world in which they and their charges have to live and move. And the attitude of the Critic well illustrates the exclusively theoretical and philosophical attitude which is too often taken by theologians and taught to seminarians; who are thereby deprived of the training that they need to be capable directors of souls. This is one of the reasons why, among priests, there are so many philosophical moralists, or ethicists, so many casuists and canonists, while there are almost no competent directors of souls. Seminarians are not trained how to meet the actual conditions they will find, but only to handle philosophical abstractions or to unravel legal entanglements. Indeed, the spirit of naturalism which so obviously inspires the Critic and many of his colleagues – a spirit which makes them so jealous of nature, so little inclined to admit any limitations of its powers or any real damage done to it as the result of sin – brings it about that seminarians are carefully shielded from knowing anything about the actual condition of the men whom they will be expected to guide: much to the devil's delight.

Against the teaching of *Applied Christianity*, the Critic cites Father Merkelbach, who says that “the more immediate and intrinsic norm of morality is practical right reason.” This teaching, the Critic thinks, contradicts the assertion of *Applied Christianity* that right reason in its ideal form is an abstraction; it also shows, in his opinion, that even in the case of individuals who perform particular actions, such right reason is the immediate practical guide of conduct. On checking back this reference, however, the reader will find that what is said by Father Merkelbach is not in the slightest degree contrary to the teaching of *Applied Christianity*. The Critic creates an appearance of opposition by emphasizing one aspect of a truth at the expense of another, while suppressing, as we have seen above, what *Applied Christianity* has to say on the side of the truth he emphasizes. The words of Father Merkelbach state a leading thesis, and he immediately follows this up with a careful definition of the several terms it contains, making his exact meaning very clear, and incidentally showing that he is not at all speaking of the reason which guides individuals in their judgment of concrete cases. He explicitly distinguishes “right reason” as he uses it in this thesis from reason as exercised by individuals in their judgment of concrete cases; he

says:

“We mean *reason*, and not merely conscience, which is the subjective rule of morality governing human acts: here we are rather speaking about the norm of objective morality. Conscience is reason in particular: by it a determinate person judges concerning the morality of a particular act and applies law to a definite concrete case. Here, however, the concern is rather with that *universal reason* which judges concerning the morality of actions *in a universal way* and fixes the law itself – such reason as *in its essence is common to all men*.”²²

Father Merkelbach goes on to define the word “right” in the phrase “right reason”, saying that the reason that he speaks of is *not* corrupted reason, but reason “judging in conformity with the eternal law, from which it proceeds as source and rule of all good.” In other words, in stating this thesis, he prescind, or *abstracts*, from both the limitations and the corruptions of reason as found concretely in individual men, and he views it in its essential, objective, abstract, and universal nature: such reason as this, he says is the norm of morality. And if he calls right reason in this sense a *practical* norm, it is not because he thinks that it makes the practical judgments of individual men in concrete cases: we have just seen that he appropriates this function to the subjective, particular reason working in conscience; he therefore means simply that the universal, abstract, objective right reason to which he refers is reason operating in the practical sphere of human morality rather than in the sphere of speculative knowledge.

However, what Father Merkelbach has here to say of right reason, while harmonizing with and confirming what is said of it in *Applied Christianity*, contributes nothing to the special spiritual problem with which the latter is concerned. He is speaking of natural morality, known by reason, and based on the eternal law. *Applied Christianity* is dealing, not with natural morality, but with the relation of natural reason to the practical demands of faith on our conduct. As for natural morality, it is taken for granted in the book; it will be known by any individual to the degree that he actually possesses right reason: this is affirmed repeatedly.²³ However, the fullness or perfection of right reason is not required in order to know the rudimentary duties imposed by natural

22. *Summa Theologiae Moralis* (Paris, 1938), 1, 115. These words appear in the paragraph from which the Critic quotes the words or the thesis itself. (Italics mine.)

law; in a civilized society, even many of its secondary and derivative duties may be widely known. But a rudimentary knowledge of natural law – even a greater, but still partial, knowledge of it – will not remove the conflict between faith and the reason of individual men with its limitations and darkness. To illustrate from an eminent director of souls the outlook of spiritual teaching and directing on this matter, I quote the following from Father Louis Lallemant:

“The reason why we are so slow in arriving at perfection, or never arrive at it at all, is, that in almost everything we are led *by nature and human views*. We follow but little, if at all, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to whom it belongs to enlighten, direct, and animate.

“The generality of religious, even the good and virtuous, follow in the guidance of their own conduct, and in the direction of others, *only reason and common sense*; and in this many of them excel. The rule is a good one, *but it is not sufficient to arrive at Christian perfection*.²⁴

No doubt the impurities, corruptions, and errors that are found in reason as it exists in individuals are opposed, not alone to faith, but also to abstract and universal right reason. Such right reason, were it to be fully realized in practice, would therefore remove these impurities. But the individual, living by his own reason, and only imperfectly able to distinguish in it the false from true, especially in matters of conduct, where he is so likely to be led by passion and habit, has no practical way to correct the waywardness of his reason except to live by faith. Faith, then, is a purifier of reason in the concrete, and the way of faith becomes, in the end, the only practical means by which men can live even *fully* reasonable lives. Hence the constant teaching of St. John of the Cross that reason is to be purified by faith.²⁵ Such a purification is necessary for two reasons, and it accordingly accomplishes a twofold result in the soul: First, it is *remedial*, correcting and overcoming the corruptions of reason in the concrete. Secondly, it also transforms and elevates the intellect – a thing which natural right reason even in its fullness cannot do, raising its activity from the merely human plane to one that is divine and super-

23. *Applied Christianity*, p. 27 [p. 30 our edition] (the citation previously given) and pp. 18 [1946 edition] and 146-147 [1946 edition].

24. *The Spiritual Doctrine of Father Louis Lallemant* (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Book Shop), p. 116. (Italics mine.)

25. *Ascent of Mount Carmel* (London: Burns, Oates), II, 6; II, 9.

natural. In this second function, faith overcomes, not merely the corruptions of reason, but also its essential inadequacy and limitation in regard to the supernatural knowledge of God. And that such an elevation to divine activity is not easy even for reason *in its perfection* is illustrated by the Fall of the Angels and of our First Parents. It was because they refused to abandon the merely natural activity of their perfect intelligences, thereby withholding the assent of faith from the word and command of God, that they fell into sin. Faith required, even of such intelligences as these, a renunciation and complete surrender of self in order to obtain that supernatural good which simply exceeds all human powers.

The viewpoint that regards the following of human reason, even when good and excellent, as a spiritual imperfection – the viewpoint illustrated above by the words of Lallemant and by the whole teaching of St. John of the Cross on faith – is obviously strange to the Critic, preoccupied as he is with philosophical concepts and merely natural norms of thinking and acting. But if he (or any other future critic) decides to take the matter up again, I would ask of him to ignore my words and answer these and the other illustrious spiritual guides whose teachings I shall hereafter adduce.

§ 2. the Theology of Pious Naturalism

The Critic objects to the teaching, found in *Applied Christianity*, that Christians should strive to rid themselves of all natural motives, even good ones, and not only such as are harmful.²⁶ He quotes a passage from the book, of which the following words are the concluding and the objectionable part:

“Hence it is impossible to distinguish good from selfish natural motives in practice; and it is therefore best to get rid of them all.”²⁷

What does the Critic object to in this statement?

“Thus, as this passage from *Applied Christianity* stands, it urges us not to allow our actions to be influenced at all by any reason within the sphere of the human mind’s natural competence.”

Again he says:

26. *Ecclesiastical Review* (January 1946), pp. 57-60.

27. *Applied Christianity*, p. 39 [p. 43 our edition].

“It [*Applied Christianity*] holds that we should take no cognizance whatever of any reason or determinant for action which could be appreciated apart from divine revelation.”

The Critic illustrates his objection by describing, from a recent book, how a Maryknoll missionary, Father Mark Tennien, served the Chinese Missions during the war through expert financial administration. Then he comments:

“Taken literally, the advice contained in *Applied Christianity* would have dissuaded Fr. Tennien from considering, or at least from being in any way influenced by, the natural motive of conserving funds.”

Now while *Applied Christianity* does advise the elimination of all natural *motives* from our lives, there is simply no truth in the statement that it would prevent people from being influenced by any human *considerations*. The book’s central and essential teaching is contained in Chapter Four, where the doctrine of motives is set forth. There (p. 35 [p. 34 our edition]) two types of motives are distinguished: first, the motive of *utility*, which obviously proceeds from natural considerations; secondly, the motive of love. And the rule given for using these motives is this: in our contacts with creatures, we should use them from a motive of utility, not from a motive of love; our motives of love should be directed to God.

That, I say, is the central rule of the book. Obviously, it does not exclude human considerations but makes clear and explicit allowance for them. Elsewhere (p. 117 [1946 edition]) this rule of utility is supplemented by another, that of necessity. So that the complete teaching of the book is that our contact with the creature-world about us is to be regulated by considerations of necessity and of utility. The Critic is here again knocking down cardboard soldiers.

As for Father Mark Tennien, his action is to be judged, objectively, according to its utility or necessity. But, *subjectively*, the supernatural merit of the act (presupposing grace and habitual charity) will be measured according to the love with which it was done. This measuring, however, will be done by God, and it would be presumptuous either for my Critic or myself to try to penetrate there: so that in calling Father Tennien’s motive natural, he can scarcely be referring to the missionary’s secret, subjective intention, the *finis operantis*, but rather to the objective end of the work itself, the *finis operis*; or at any rate he can be speaking of the former only insofar as it refers to the latter and measures its utility. Yet

it is precisely the subjective motive, the *finis operantis*, that would reveal the spiritual value and supernatural merit of the work for Father Tennien. Let me add – not as a thing of importance, or as comparable to the work of Father Tennien, but simply for an illustration or the practical bearing of the advice given in *Applied Christianity* – that I myself also have been compelled by these attacks in the *Ecclesiastical Review* to do some fancy financiering. For, since the advantage of answering these criticisms in the *Review* has not been made available to me, I am compelled to provide my own means of defense, which is not an inconsiderable difficulty for a curate in a country parish. However, whether it is Father Tennien, or the Critic, or myself, or any other religious or priest, engaged in whatever excellent or useful works, these natural considerations of utility are no means of obtaining or increasing supernatural merit, grace, and charity. The principle of merit is charity, and it is therefore by motives of love that we make charity operative, thereby growing in grace and Christian perfection. The value of the rule requiring utility is simply that it allows for a due subordination of our works to charity. St. Alphonsus, illustrating from the Gospel the need for purity of intention, writes as follows (he is speaking particularly to nuns but his remarks apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to all others):

“Whilst our Redeemer travelled through the cities and towns preaching the kingdom of God, he was one day accompanied by a great crowd: *a woman having an issue of blood* made her way through the throng until she succeeded in touching the hem of his garment. He asked: *who is it that touched me?* Surprised at the question, the disciples answered: *Master, the multitude throng and press thee and dost thou say, Who touched me?* but Our Lord meant not the material touch, but the faith and devotion with which the woman had touched His garment. Hence St. Augustine has written: ‘Many press round Jesus Christ, but few touch Him.’ Many nuns submit to great labor through the monastery, in order to increase the revenues of the convent, in order to celebrate their festivals with great pomp, and perform many actions that appear to be great; but because their intention is not pure, they press round Jesus Christ, but do not touch Him; hence they annoy rather than please Him.”²⁸

★ ★ ★

28. *True Spouse of Jesus Christ* (Brooklyn: The Redemptorist Fathers), p. 599.

The reader may wonder how the Critic has come, once again, to misrepresent the teaching of *Applied Christianity* and at the same time, fall into such a blunder as indicated above. The reason is not difficult to seek. He fails to make any distinction between natural motives, natural activity, natural reason, and natural virtues; and when he sees the book advising readers to get rid of natural motives, he concludes, amidst clouds of confusion, that it wants them also to get rid of all natural activity, natural reason, and natural virtues. But as I pointed out to the former Critic,²⁹ the death and annihilation of nature that *Applied Christianity* insists upon, is entirely moral, and is not of the physical or ontological order; it is confined to the will, to the elimination from the will of natural affections and motives.

This confusion in the mind of the Critic is all the more remarkable in that it is he who points out “the confusion and the inaccuracies which abound in *Applied Christianity*”! Yet *Applied Christianity* clearly and consistently distinguishes between natural reason, natural activity, and natural motives. And while it insists strongly on the mortification of natural motives, it affirms with equal emphasis, that natural reason and natural activity are *not* to be mortified. Thus it says of natural activity (p. 26 [p. 29 our edition]):

“Our physical activity – the activity of senses, body, intellect, and heart – is not in conflict with our supernatural destiny. We can, therefore, engage in this activity without giving up a supernatural way of life. There is, then, no need to mortify (i.e. to destroy or injure) natural activity in the interests of a mortified Christian life.”

As to natural reason, I have already mentioned that the book affirms that “there is no discord between the natural truths of reason, and those of faith”. Let me quote only this additional remark (p. 27 [p. 30 our edition]):

“This [i.e., living a supernatural life by faith] does not mean that we are to cultivate eccentricities, in the delusion that we thereby live by faith. To live by faith is not to mortify one’s self by denying that two and two are four or that Columbus discovered America, or by making one’s self ridiculous in other ways.”

It is only after having made these affirmations, as a matter of funda-

29. *Nature and the Supernatural: A Reply to Criticisms*. Chap. V, “Exaggerated Supernaturalism.”

mental doctrine, that *Applied Christianity* goes on to advise the elimination of natural *motives* from the will.

The Critic, besides failing to note these distinctions in the book, does not make them himself, and, on the contrary, confuses natural reason, natural activity, natural virtues, and natural motives all together. This is evident in his definition of motive. “A motive,” he says, “is some consideration or reason which impels us to act in one way rather than another.”³⁰ He cites no authority for this definition, and I am quite sure that he cannot. For a motive is *not* a *reason* or a *consideration*. Such a definition would place motives in the intellect, since it is the intellect that *considers* and *reasons*, whereas motives are formed by *the will*.

The object of the will is good; and when it chooses some good as an end, we say it intends this good, or forms an *intention*. An intention, therefore, is the hold taken by the will on the good that it chooses as an end. And a motive is the same as an intention; they are synonyms; the only difference is that while “intention” suggests the act of intending or choosing an end, “motive” supposes that the end is already chosen and is now an actual moral driving force.³¹ The Critic is certainly in error when he defines a motive as a consideration or a reason, which belong to the intellect. He is in error also when he says that a *reason* or *consideration* impels the will: it is *good* that impels the will. And his confusion (not mine) explains why he can falsely accuse me of barring all human or natural considerations (of utility or necessity or propriety) from a place of influence in human conduct. What in fact I urge readers to eliminate are natural attachments, natural affections, and natural motives or intentions: all of these belong to the will, and their mortification is accomplished within the will, that is, in the moral or spiritual order, without the slightest prejudice physically to reason or any other faculties of body or soul.

It is true, I know (the objection is idle), that the will is a blind faculty and depends on the intellect for guidance: the good it chooses is a good first apprehended and indicated by the intellect. Nevertheless, it is the intellect and not the will that considers and reasons, while the will desires, chooses, intends, loves, enjoys. To love a person is not the same

30. *Ecclesiastical Review*, p. 58.

31. This is the doctrine of St. Thomas, as is shown even by the title given to the Question in which he treats of this subject – *De Motivo Voluntatis*. In this question also he lays down the principle which is the basis of the remarks made here: “*Bonum autem in communi, quod habet rationes finis, est objectum voluntatis.*” (I II, 9, 1) See also, below note No. 28.

as knowing him, even though we must know him before we love him; and many whom we know we do not love. Similarly, we must know a good before we can intend it, before it can be a motive for our actions; consideration by the mind, weighing the advantages of several goods, precedes the choice by the will of some particular good: yet there are many goods that we know and consider but do not intend, and for that reason they have no power to motivate our actions.

In the same way, the Critic fails to distinguish between natural motives and natural virtues; and because I recommend the elimination of the former, he seems to think that I am discouraging the practice of the latter. But can we not practice the natural virtues from the supernatural motive of love? St. Thomas says that natural virtues, apart from charity, are not even true virtues, for it is charity, or love, which directs them to their ultimate supernatural end.³² Of course, the Critic himself admits that the natural virtues should be directed to God by a supernatural motive, but he adds:

“Still God does demand that justice and veracity and gratitude should be real determinants in our lives. It is certainly not in accordance with His teaching to urge men to get rid of such motives.”³³

If the Critic means that natural *virtues* should be determinants in our lives, this may be allowed. But he says that natural *motives*, that is, motives derived from these virtues, *must* be such determinants. This is an example of the confusion of thought that I speak of, and it is *not* to be allowed. Where does God demand this? Where is the text, where the decree, where the teaching of an approved spiritual author? As usual, the Critic offers not the slightest evidence or authority for this statement. And of course, there is none: the evidence is to the contrary. “The *end* of the commandment is charity.” (I Tim. 1, 5) In other words, all the virtues and precepts are to be directed to charity as to their end; and this is done, physically by grace and infused charity, but morally and subjectively by a motive of charity, a supernatural motive, since, as we have seen, a motive is the will’s grip on the good that is chosen as end. And St. Thomas, in teaching that charity is the form and soul of all the other virtues, having a relation to them akin to that of the soul towards the body, adds that in the moral sphere such a formative and determining influence is provided by

32. See II II, 23, 7, c. “*Et sic nulla vera virtus potest esse sine caritate.*”

33. *Op. cit.*, p. 60.

an end; so that charity is the end which determines and directs all natural virtues.³⁴ Hence, if one chooses a natural virtue as an end, he performs a morally good act but he does not respond to God's urgent invitation to do all things out of love. The end given to us by God is charity: hence our motives, even in the fulfillment of natural duties, should be one of love.

“Yet again after we have extolled these particular virtues [other than charity] we must reciprocally refer all their honor to divine love, *which to every one gives all the sanctity which they have*. For what else does the glorious Apostle mean when he teaches that *charity is kind, is patient, that it believes all, hopes all, bears all*, save that charity ordains and commands patience to be patient, hope to hope, faith to believe. And truly, Theotimus, at the same time the Apostle intimates that love is the soul and life of all the virtues, as though he would say: patience is not patient enough, nor faith faithful enough, nor confident enough, nor mildness sweet enough, unless love animate and quicken them. The same thing this same vessel of election gives us to understand when he says that nothing profits him and he is nothing without charity; for it is as though he had said, that without love a man is not patient, nor mild, nor constant, nor faithful, nor hopeful, in the way a servant of God should be, which is the true and desirable being of man.”³⁵

In saying that the Critic can produce no evidence for his statement that natural motives are *required*, I am not forgetting that, in the view of some theologians, morally good natural motives are *sufficient*, if one is in the state of grace, for performing supernaturally meritorious actions. The question here, however, is not whether such motives are *sufficient*: it is whether they are ever a *duty*. Even if the theological teaching referred to is allowed (it is by no means certain), the conclusion does not follow that such motives are a duty, or that acting from them is the best, the most generous, the most perfect, most meritorious, or most fruitful way of living a Christian life. Quite apart from spiritual writers, who invariably try to move souls to act from the most exalted motives, it would be impossible to find *even one* technical theologian, interested rather in the

34. “*Dicendum quod in moralibus forma actus attenditur principaliter ex parte finis; cujus ratio est quia principium moralium actuum est voluntas, cujus objectum et quasi forma est finis. . . Dicendum quod caritas dicitur finis aliarum virtutum quia omnes alias virtutes ordinat ad finem suum.*” II II, 23, 8.

35. St. Francis de Sales, *The Love of God*, XI, 4.

Careful definition of doctrinal truth than in directly exhorting the faithful to piety, who says that natural motives are ever better or more perfect than those which are supernatural, that the latter interfere with the required practice of the natural virtues, or that they do not contain, as a whole contains a part, and infinitely surpass whatever good is found in natural motives.

As for spiritual writers, let St. John of the Cross stand for them, since he speaks directly on the point under discussion. His teaching, although it must be added to what has already been said, for the sake of completeness and accuracy, as well as because it is immediately pertinent to the Critic's objection, will undoubtedly appear as blasphemy to the theologians of pious naturalism. It is that, although we must practice the natural virtues, we must also, if we wish to advance spiritually, practice detachment even from them: not in the sense that we are to remain indifferent to our duties or may excuse ourselves from fidelity to them under pretence, of living a higher life, but in the sense that we are not to dally in the merely naturally good to which these virtues lead us or seek the merely human satisfaction which their exercise brings. Such virtues are excellent enough in themselves, but the Christian is not to rest content with their goodness nor with their natural fruit. Here is how the Saint states the matter:

“But although the Christian should rejoice in this first way [i.e., as the barbarians and heathens do] in the formal good that he possesses and in the good works of a temporal kind which he does, since they lead to the temporal blessings we have described, he must not allow his joy to stop at this first stage (as we have said the heathen did, because their spiritual sight did not extend beyond the things of this mortal life); but, since he has the light of faith, wherein he hopes for eternal life, without which nothing that belongs to this life and the next will be of any value to him, he must rejoice principally and solely in the possession and employment of these moral goods after the second manner – namely, in that he doing these works *for the love of God* he will gain eternal life. And thus he should set his eyes and his rejoicing solely on serving and honoring God with his good customs and virtues. For without this intention the virtues are of *no worth* in the sight of God... And likewise many persons of old had many virtues and practised good works, and many Christians have them nowadays and accomplish great acts, which will *profit them nothing* for eternal life, because they have not sought in them the glory and honor which belong to God alone. The

Christian, then, must rejoice, not in the performing of good works and the following of good customs, but in doing them *for the love of God alone*, without respect to aught else soever. For inasmuch as good works that are done to serve God alone will have the greater reward in glory, the greater will be the confusion in the presence of God of those who *have done them for other reasons*.

“The Christian, then, if he will direct his rejoicing to God with regard to moral good, trust that the value of his good works, fasts, alms, penances, etc., is not based upon the number or the totality of them, but upon the love of God which inspires him to do them; and that they are the more excellent when they are performed with a purer and sincerer love of God, and when there is less in them of self-interest, joy, pleasure, consolation and praise, whether with reference to this world or to the next.”³⁶

That the Saint has to say here is so much to the point that I should like to quote it all. But one make an end. The Critic, it will be recalled, has said that it is a duty to act from natural motives at least at times and in the practice of the natural virtues. The Saint says that – for a Christian – it is a duty not to act from natural motives, even in the necessary practice of the natural virtues. Of the rest of the latter’s doctrine on this subject – of the seven evils that overtake the soul. who indulges in “vain rejoicing in his good works and habits”, of the five spiritual benefits it will enjoy if remaining detached from natural good – I shall not now speak in detail, referring the reader to the author’s own treatment of the matter, but shall mention, as especially pertinent, just one of the seven evils:

“The fifth of these evils is that such persons make no progress on the road of perfection, nor, since they are attached to the pleasure and consolation which they find in their good works, it follows that, when they find no such pleasure and consolation in their good works and exercises, which is ordinarily when God desires to lead them on, by giving them the dry bread of the perfect and taking from them the milk of babes, in order to prove their strength and purge their delicate appetites so that they may be able to enjoy the food of grown men, they commonly faint and cease to persevere, because their good works give them no pleasure.”³⁷

36. [Unreadable].



The reader will perhaps wish to know what precisely is meant by *Applied Christianity*, when, having allowed for considerations of necessity or utility, it goes on to advise souls to get rid of *all* natural motives, whether good or harmful. The Critic himself suggests a sense in which, as he admits, the words can be taken in a manner that is orthodox, i.e., if they are understood to mean only that “all the reasons which contribute to the determination of an action” are “*one* motive, and that... the ultimate or supreme determinant should be that of divine and supernatural charity”.³⁸ If only this were meant, then the Critic concedes that *Applied Christianity* would be enunciating “a primary principle in all the traditional literature of Catholic spirituality”. But he insists that what the book says is something quite different, namely, “that we should take no cognizance whatever of any reason or determinant for action which could be appreciated apart from divine revelation”. Allowing for the confusion between motives and considerations spoken of above, the Critic here means, I believe, that the meaning of *Applied Christianity* is, not simply that natural motives should be subordinated to those that are supernatural (which he says would be correct), but that we should actually root out and discard merely natural motives.

In this the Critic is correct – that *is* the meaning of *Applied Christianity*: for once he does not substitute a cardboard soldier of his own making for the doctrine of the book. But I believe and insist that this teaching of the book is true traditional Catholic spirituality, while what the Critic offers as a “primary principle” of such spirituality, again without evidence or authority to support his view, is in reality a dilution and diminution of the traditional doctrine. Hence, while I am deeply grateful to those friends who have intervened with the Critic to save this work from the taint of bad doctrine, still I must say that they should not fear to accept the teaching of *Applied Christianity* just as it stands and as the Critic has rightly interpreted it. indeed, I urge them to accept it in this sense – which to abandon would be to suffer spiritual loss. We should get rid of natural motives.

To understand this matter fully, and to set it forth with accuracy and detail, it is necessary to make two distinctions. They were not made in *Applied Christianity* because this was intended to be a manual of piety, not a textbook of philosophy. The omission is more remarkable in the

37. [Unreadable].

38. *Op. cit.*, p. 59.

case of the Critic, who claims to speak in the interest of theological accuracy. And by failing to make these distinctions, while treating as one, under the cover of vague and undefined notions, things that are in fact distinct, he is able to give some plausibility to his charges.

The first distinction, already suggested, is that between “the end of a worker”, the *finis operantis*, and “the end of a work”, the *finis operis*. The end of a work is inherent in it, being fixed by its very nature. Thus the end of carpentry is the making of furniture or of dwellings, the end of the apostolate is the conversion of souls. The “end of a worker” is a man’s own private end in doing any work, and it may or may not coincide with the end of the work. A carpenter may work out of love for his craft, perhaps out of greed for money; a missionary may work from zeal for souls or out of mere vainglory.

It was failure to make this first distinction that led the former Critic into one of his false charges. Because *Applied Christianity*, which is largely interested in the *finis operantis*, urges Catholics to act always from love of God, this Critic said that it excluded all secondary or intermediate ends, that is, all ordinary human works that must be performed in the course of any normal life. The charge of course is ridiculous; and I showed, in replying, that while the concern of *Applied Christianity* is chiefly with the subjective end of him who acts, it nevertheless clearly teaches that all naturally good and morally indifferent actions (without entering further into the details of such actions) may be raised to the supernatural plane through charity. Of course some works objectively considered, are better than others – i.e., missionary work is of greater dignity than carpentry. Still, the spiritual value and merit of good works depend chiefly on the charity of him who does them. That is why men in humble callings are often holier than those who are busied daily in the holiest of tasks.

The present Critic’s objection, so far as it varies from that of the former, is rather concerned with the *finis operantis*. But here also a distinction – the second one, spoken of above – must be made. According to moralists there are three kinds of good which may be chosen by the will as an end, thus becoming motives of action: the useful good, *bonum utile*; the delectable good, *bonum delectabile*; the moral good, *bonum honestum*. As already said, *Applied Christianity* retains the useful good as a subordinate motive; and therefore the natural motives it counsels souls to get rid of are those which choose the delectable good and the (naturally) moral good. A word on each of these motives.

The motive of utility, or the useful good taken as end, differs from the *finis operis* in that it is subjective – that is, it is in the will of the one

who acts rather than in the work that is done; and it judges the utility of a work, not in reference to the latter's inherent end, but rather, in relation to some further and final end. The useful good is retained because it is morally neutral, can be used for good or evil (which would be chosen, subjectively, as a good), and for either a natural or supernatural end. The useful good is not therefore a good in the complete or perfect sense: its goodness depends on the ultimate end and good that controls it.³⁹ The same means, (let us say, such administrative skill as Father Tennien's) that are used by one man to merit grace and glory may be used by another to further a career of crime (which *to him* is a final "good"). Hence a useful good can be directed to the love and glory of God; that is why *Applied Christianity* gives it as an immediate norm for judging the use of creatures, while stipulating that the ultimate end is to be love of God.

There is, however, one limitation that must be attached to this acceptance of the useful good as a proximate motive for the child of God. Many of the things that the world deems useful are not so considered in the teaching of Jesus. Wealth, honor, power, worldly wisdom – the very means that men of the world at once seek in promoting their ends, are esteemed as of no value by Jesus, who prefers poverty, humility, simplicity, littleness.

As to the delectable good, pleasure, the child of God should certainly eschew it as *a motive*; that is, it should not be chosen as an *end*. Obviously, it is not possible to renounce pleasure altogether, for it is inseparably connected with all vital functions, being attached to them by God Himself. But it can be renounced as a deliberate and voluntary end, and therefore as a motive. When pleasure is accepted, with interior detachment, as the inevitable accompaniment and lubricant of vital functions, it is used according to the plan of God. But when it is raised to the dignity of an end, God intending it only as a means, disorder begins to appear. Some moralists believe that pleasure *as an end* is an evil or at least an imperfection; at best it is morally indifferent.⁴⁰ There is therefore *no obligation* to seek it as an end, and the more perfect and meritorious

39. "Unde voluntas proprie est ipsius finis. Ea vero quæ sunt ad finem, non sunt bona vel volita propter seipsa, sed ex ordine ad finem. Unde voluntas, in ea non fertur, nisi quatenus fertur in finem, unde hoc ipsum quod in eis vult, est finis." (I II, 8, 2)

40. Billuart holds that any natural action whose end is not moral good is evil. (See his *Summa Sancti Thomæ* (Ed. Nova, Paris), II, p. 314. To Noldin, however, the pleasurable good, taken as an end, is indifferent. See his *Summa Theologiæ Moralis* (21 ed., Ratisbon: Fr. Pustet), I, § 75.

thing is to renounce all voluntary pleasure. Even though you wish to consider pleasure as an end, a positive good, it is but a good of the natural order which may be commendably and meritoriously renounced in favor of a supernatural good.

My former Critic objected to this doctrine and attacked it with great determination. I answered him by explaining it in greater detail than is given in the preceding paragraph and by citing the authority of St. John of the Cross who gives, as a rule for beginners, that “every pleasure that presents itself to the senses, if it be not purely for the honor and glory of God, must be renounced and completely rejected for the love of Jesus Christ...”⁴¹ The reader may refer to the first *Reply* for a more complete treatment of this subject.⁴²

Let me add here only that in thus advising the elimination of the delectable good or pleasure as a motive, *Applied Christianity* does not forbid, or outlaw, or even discourage, legitimate and necessary recreation. It is characteristic of the degraded hedonistic mentality of our age to confuse recreation, whose importance and place in human life it is prone to exaggerate, with mere pleasure, luxury, and self-indulgence. In this matter, *Applied Christianity* follows the Thomistic and traditional Catholic view: which regards legitimate recreation as a genuine utility and even a necessity, capable therefore of being supernaturalized by means or charity and a supernatural motive. The Critics who have attacked *Applied Christianity* for outlawing recreation on the ground that it advises the renunciation of mere pleasure, reflect rather the false views of the age than a true Christian mentality. Recreation, of a lawful kind, and within bounds, is a true utility and necessity, a positive act of virtue; only, as St. Thomas also says, quoting Aristotle, it is with recreation as with salt: a little goes a long way.⁴³

We come now to consider the third kind of good, the moral good, which may also be taken as a motive. It is the advice of *Applied Christianity*, to get rid even of this motive, which causes the greatest difficulty. Why counsel the elimination of a motive that is morally good? Because such a motive, although good, is a good of an inferior order, and it is far better, infinitely better, for a child of God, who has been called to a supernatural destiny, to choose the supernatural good, God and union with God, as his motive. Observe: I do not say that it is *necessary* to give up

41. *Op. cit.*, I, 13.

42. See Chapter II, “The Critic’s Third General Comment.”

43. II II, 168, 4.

morally good natural motives *under pain of sin*. I do not say that such motives are wholly without merit in a Christian (that is a doubtful matter). I simply say that it is better, more generous, more appropriate to a child of God, more meritorious, more loving, more pleasing to God to act out of love for Him than for any merely natural good.

In my first *Reply*, in answering a similar objection made by the former Critic, I cited a passage from Canon Saudreau that explains perfectly the reasons for discarding merely natural motives. The present Critic has evidently paid no attention to it. I shall therefore quote it again:

“When the soul gives itself up to a good impulse by some consideration that is purely natural, the action is good, but it does not merit eternal life ; or at least, if we admit with St. Thomas that in a just man there is always a virtual intention of referring everything to God, the merit of this action is less than it might have been. It is a serious loss for the Christian soul. A director must make it plain that *simply natural virtues, or virtues in which faith has such a slight part, are insufficient, almost valueless for heaven*. He must advise his penitent to act with more exalted intentions and from Christian motives.”⁴⁴

It may, however, be asked: “But cannot we simply keep our natural motives and subordinate them to charity, in accordance with what the Critic has called a “primary principle” of Catholic spirituality? We may, indeed: but to do so is to live very largely on the natural plane; it is to fall in the fervor that should accompany charity; it is to sacrifice merit that might easily be gained; it is to refuse grace that is easily within one’s reach.

It is a poor teacher that robs his own pupils. If a person assumes responsibility for teaching a certain trade or subject to others, it is to be assumed that he will teach to the best of his ability, that he will convey as much knowledge as he can to his students, and that he will train them in the surest and most efficient methods or procedures proper to the given subject. What would we think of a teacher who would deliberately withhold important knowledge or train his students in clumsy or inefficient methods? In teaching the Christian life, we should similarly teach our pupils the best, the most efficient, and most fruitful way of living on earth. This is done by teaching them to act always out of the motive of supernatural love. When we teach them to act out of merely natural

44. *The Degrees of the Spiritual Life* (London: Burns, Oates) I, 219. (Italics mine)

motives, we deprive them of quantities of the most precious gifts that have been bestowed on men: grace and glory.

But why is it necessary, to perfect supernatural motives, to get rid of natural ones? St. John of the Cross well explains:

“For as the strength of the desire, when it is divided, is less than if it were set wholly on one thing alone, and as, the more are the objects whereon it is set, the less of it there is for each one of them, for this cause philosophers say that virtue in union is stronger than if it be dispersed.”⁴⁵

In other words, it is a psychological law or limitation of the will, that the more its energies are dissipated among a number of objects, the less can they be concentrated on any one object. So that to disperse them among a number of natural ends, however excellent, is in that measure to withhold them from the supreme and infinitely more meritorious good which is God. Remember in this connection the principle, quoted above from St. John of the Cross, that requires detachment even from moral good.

In view of these considerations, what happens to what the Critic has called a “primary principle” of Catholic spirituality? It simply explodes. I have already observed that he offers no evidence for thus holding that to retain natural motives, although in subordination to charity, is such a primary principle. He does not cite one accepted spiritual author to confirm his words. And of course he could not. Compare his contention with that quoted above, of Saudreau, that “it is a serious loss for the Christian soul” to act out of natural motives. I shall conclude this section by citing a number of other authors to the same effect. In each of these citations, it will be noticed, the writer does not advise that natural virtues be subordinated to charity, but actually treats of human nature as in some sense retarding the activity of grace and nature and therefore advises an elimination of merely natural motives of action.

Now there are two reasons why cultivating nature and the human spirit retards the activity of grace. The first is that nature, however good, is of a vastly lower order than grace, and to be preoccupied with it, to be too zealous for its rights, too anxious for its merely natural good, is to neglect grace and be insensitive to its impulses. The second reason is that, in concrete reality, our nature is tainted by concupiscence, which tends to turn its good impulses awry and fix them on mere temporal goods. This

45. *Op. cit.*, I, 10.

does not mean – contrary to the view of both the former and the present Critic – only that concupiscence leads men into *sin*: quite apart from sin, or long before it leads to a disorder having the stature of sin, it bores into our actions to spoil them, without however utterly ruining their moral goodness, much as worms bore into apples to spoil without destroying them; so that God must get whatever good he can out of such actions, as a person tries to eat the good portions of a wormy apple. All such manifestations of concupiscence, which, without leading us wholly into sin, partially corrupt so many of our actions by vanity or sensuality, are certainly to be eliminated as far as possible by correspondence with grace. These manifestations are, not sins, but imperfections and they include natural attachments or affections for creatures and natural motives. Mark also that natural attachments and motives, apart from the taint of concupiscence, may and should be described as imperfections when they are not formed and animated by charity: in this sense St. Thomas calls even the natural virtues, apart from charity, “imperfect” and, as already mentioned, not even true virtues.⁴⁶

Now both these modes of imperfection are to be found inextricably mixed together in concrete reality. That is why, in the passage cited by the Critic from *Applied Christianity* as the basis for this whole objection, it is said that *in practice* it is impossible to distinguish good from harmful natural motives. By harmful natural motives is not meant here such as are sinful, but those which in any measure are spoiled by egoism or sensuality. Thus it is a great tragedy to go into a classroom and hear teachers, in order to incite their pupils to greater efforts, appealing to such motives as vanity, a spirit of prideful competition, the desire for success, and the ambition to excel others. These, they think, are “good” natural motives. But do not such motives encourage the growth of that egoism of the fallen natural man which it is the whole purpose of Catholic asceticism and true Christian education to root out? These motives are not sinful, but sooner or later they will lead to sin. The element of evil or egoism in such motives may be very small, ever minute. Seeds, too, are small, but when they are cultivated, they grow into plants and trees. And “the evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit” (Matt. 7, 17) Natural motives will also bring forth evil fruit, and infallibly (unless mortified by a supernatural life), although not immediately. You do not

46. See II II, 23, 7. “*Si vero illud bonum particulare sit verum bonum, puta conservatio civitatis vel alia huiusmodi, erit quidem vera virtus, sed imperfecta, nisi referatur ad finale et perfectum bonum. Et secundum hoc simpliciter vera virtus sine caritate esse non potest.*”

plant a seed one day and go out with a basket on the following day to gather the fruit. Growth requires time. And therefore, such teachers are misled by the fact their motives they teach do not *immediately* bring forth their evil fruit. But this fruit will come in due time, never fear: and that the pupils are now out of the teacher's sphere of direct influence does not exempt the latter from responsibility.

The following authors deplore the ravages of the natural human spirit for both of the reasons that have been mentioned; sometimes the one is prominent in what they write, sometimes the other; more often both are mixed together in their minds as they are also in reality.

Father Edward Leen explains that we should never rest satisfied with mere human objects or ideals, no matter how excellent:

“A man lives as befits him to live when he lives by reason, and by proper ideals, and by an emotional and aesthetic nature made docile to reason. A man lives as befits a Christian man to live when reason, ideals, and aesthetic appreciation are illuminated by the light of faith.”⁴⁷

He develops this thought more fully elsewhere:

“Weighing everything according to the standard measures of the Gospel should become a habit. It is not enough for the Member of Christ to apply reason to his affairs. Habitually narrowing to this scope, one's efforts after good, would bring about, essentially, a weakening of the supernatural element in conduct. Christ's religion is far more than an excellent philosophy. Philosophy aims only at excellence of nature. The ethics of Jesus are essentially supernatural. His teaching is not a code but a life. It will, in consequence, happen fairly frequently that faith will dictate something which reason cannot, indeed, condemn, but to which it will feel no obligation to aspire. The moral value of the acts of Christ's members is strictly valued by the measure of the supernatural that is in them. Their acts, to come up to the requirements of the divine Master, must be reasonable, but more than reasonable. They must be ‘faith-ful’, or using an adjective that served in another connection they must be ‘grace-ful’. For the faith in them must be ‘informed’ by the love of God. It is the principle in which they take their rise that determines the moral character of our acts. They are supernatural only if they have

47. *What is Education?* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1944), p. 4.

their rise in faith; merely human if they are dictated by reason only, and merely animal if they come from sensibility uncontrolled by reason.”⁴⁸

Canon Saudreau, an eminently practical director, explains that we are not only to go beyond nature but we are also to be vigilant that nature does not enter to impel our actions:

“*Apart from the devil’s suggestions and the obviously evil inclinations of nature*, human activity may produce other movements and tendencies in the soul which it is important for us to discern, in order that we may not confound them with divine inspirations.”⁴⁹

Father Frederick William Faber explains why it is that we must beware of the human spirit:

“There are three spirits with which men have to do, the Divine, the diabolical, and the human. This last is a definite and distinct spirit by itself; and consists of the inclinations of our fallen human nature when not allied to either of the other spirits. So that the mischief which it causes in the spiritual life is chiefly of a negative character, inasmuch as it leads us *to act from purely natural motives* and in a *purely natural* way, apart from grace. It is known by its always gravitating, independent of any satanical impulsion, to peace, comfort, ease, liberty, and making ample provision for the body. In a word, it is to good persons, what the spirits of the world are to bad people, incessantly acting on them even when gross temptations would have no effect. It vitiates what they do, without making it wholly evil.”⁵⁰

Father Augustine Baker shows how this human spirit spoils our actions:

“... What a world of actions, in themselves of no ill aspect, are there done by imperfect, extroverted souls, which, having no other fountain, principle, or light from which they are at first derived but the light of *human reason*, they will find at God’s hands *no acceptance at all*; such souls lose all benefits by all their doings but those which are of absolute necessity, and by many of

48. *The True Vine and its Branches* (New York: Kennedy, 1938), pp. 137-138.

49. *Loc. cit.* (Italics mine.)

50. *Op. cit.*, p. 87. (Italics mine.)

those likewise.”⁵¹

Abbot Marmion emphasizes the inadequacy of the natural virtues:

“Remember this truth: no natural virtue, however powerful it may be, can be raised of itself to a supernatural level: that only belongs to the infused virtues, and this constitutes their superiority and preeminence.”⁵²

The same author, recommending that each action be “done with an *explicit* intention of love of God”, also says:

“What follows from thence? This consequence, which puts into full relief the eminence of charity, that our supernatural life and our holiness grow and progress according to the degree of love with which we perform our acts. Take the accomplishment of any act, (provided, of course, that this act be, as we have seen supernatural and in accordance with the Divine order), take any exercise of piety, justice, religion, humility, obedience, or patience, and the more the love of God is perfect, pure, disinterested and intense, that is to say, the more the main spring of these acts is our love for God, for his interests and glory, the more elevated is the degree of merit of this act; and hence more rapid is the increase of grace and divine life in us.”⁵³

Finally, here is what Father Lallemant has to say in a chapter entitled “We ought to act on Supernatural Principles” (the citation given above from this writer’s works is also to the point here):

“Our heart is unceasingly attracted towards good; but it is always some *natural good*, unless the Holy Spirit gives it a higher aim. We ought then to watch all the movements of the heart, in order to follow *only those* which come from the Holy Spirit.

“The holy angels *never* performed those actions which we call *purely natural*; they renounced forever their self-love from the pure motive of the love of God; and whilst they were in a state of probation, they performed *only* acts of faith, hope, and charity, and other supernatural virtues. Thus it is that they merited the possession of God, and were rendered eternally blessed.

-
- 51. *Sancta Sophia* (London: Burns, Oates), p. 109. (Italics mine.)
 - 52. *Christ the Life of the Soul* (London: Sands and Co., 1935), p. 223.
 - 53. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

“We ought to imitate this fidelity of the angels, acting *always* on supernatural principles. But we are wholly immersed *in our own nature*, and most of our acts are either *merely natural*, or proceed partly from grace, and *partly from nature*. Scarcely any are wholly of grace and perfectly supernatural.”⁵⁴

Such is Catholic spirituality. Let the theologians of pious naturalism answer these writers – if they have not been holding their hands over their ears at hearing such eminent authorities speak so irreverently of actions that proceed from nature!

There is no need to multiply citations further, although this could be done indefinitely. All these authorities accept the teaching that nature is substantially good and capable of morally good actions. Yet all urge that Christians should not be satisfied with natural moral goodness, but rather allow grace and charity to propel their actions, even such acts as are prescribed by natural law or such habits as proceed from natural virtues. “The end of the commandment is charity.” (I Tim. 1, 5) Hence the Apostle also wrote: “*Whatever* you do in word or in work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” (Col. 3, 17)

§ 3. Food for the Dogs

Another doctrine that the Critic attacks is that concerning natural affections.⁵⁵ *Applied Christianity* teaches that natural affections should be mortified. The Critic says this is not so. On the contrary, he says, “if we live rightly according to the dictates of Christian revelation, we must exercise this obligatory but still essentially natural *activity* [of gratitude and filial love].” And he takes the doctrine of *Applied Christianity* to mean nothing “less than the abandonment of all activity connected with the acquired moral virtues.”

As a preliminary, let it be stated again that the mortification of natural affection spoken of in *Applied Christianity* is of the moral order. It is *not* a suppression of the *natural activity* of the will, not a mortification of any physical powers, but a moral renunciation of voluntary natural motives, attachments and affections. Part of the Critic’s difficulty results from *his* confusion of the moral and ontological orders. I do not ask for any suppression or mortification of natural activity or of moral virtues,

54. *Op. cit.*, p. 100. (Italics mine.)

55. *Op. cit.*, p. 60-61.

contrary to what he says in the passages quoted; and, as shown above,⁵⁶ provision is explicitly made against any such misinterpretation. What is meant is that the free and habitual acts of the will, by which it attaches itself to creatures, should be mortified or renounced. Thus the difficulty is partly verbal. But the fact that the Critic is not able to understand, the mortification of natural affections in a correct and orthodox sense at all, shows how completely he fails to grasp a basic principle of spiritual living.

The former Critic also objected to this doctrine of natural attachments or affections. I answered him by citing certain passages of St. Francis de Sales and St. John of the Cross in which this teaching is clearly set forth. But the present Critic ignores these citations and repeats the same charge. Let me say this to him: "If you object to this doctrine, how will you explain these passages in the works of these saints? Do not concern yourself with my statements: answer *them*." Here is a typical passage from St. John of the Cross:

"The reason for which it is necessary for the soul, in order to attain to divine union with God, to pass through this dark night of mortification of the desires and denial of pleasures in all things is because *all the affections it has for creatures are pure darkness* in the eyes of God, and when the soul is clothed in *these affections*, it has *no capacity* for being enlightened by the pure and simple light of God, if it cast them not first from it: for light cannot agree with darkness: since, as St. John says; *Tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt*. That is: the darkness could not receive the light."⁵⁷

I have deliberately chosen a passage in which the Saint uses the word *affections* for creatures, rather than attachments. He uses both these phrases indiscriminately, and expressly describes them as synonyms.⁵⁸ If the Critic objects to this doctrine, let him dispute the matter with St John of the Cross.

The particular point of the former Critic's objection was his contention that only disordered affections or attachments need be mortified. I pointed out, by citing passages, that both St. John of the Cross and St Francis de Sales had urged the mortification of *all* merely

56. See § 1.

57. *Op. cit.*, I, 4. (Italics mine.)

58. *Ibid.*, I, 11. Other synonyms are *whim*, *desire*, *natural desire*.

natural affections and not merely those which are sinfully disordered (the above passage from St. John is sufficient to vindicate this). For the saints, the very fact that an attachment is natural – that is, – morally blameless but not motivated by the love of God – makes it disordered when judging from the plane of the supernatural.

The difficulty of the present Critic, so far as I can see, is in admitting that *all* natural affections should be mortified. He claims some exceptions; hence the examples of gratitude and filial love. But St. John of the Cross is no less explicit on this point: *all* natural affections or attachments, even the smallest, should be mortified. He says, for example:

“That which I say, and that which is to the point for my purpose, is that *any* desire, although it be for but the smallest imperfection, stains and defiles the soul.”⁵⁹

Ah, the Critic may say, but it is only desire for *imperfection* that defiles the soul, not any natural attachment or affection. Unfortunately for this objection, any natural affection, in the teaching of the Saint, is an imperfection.

“... Darkness, which is affection for creatures, and light, which is God, are contrary to each other.”⁶⁰

Again:

“Some habits of voluntary imperfections, which are never completely conquered, prevent not only the attainment of divine union, *but also progress in perfection.*”⁶¹

And what are these imperfections that prevent progress in perfection? He answers:

“These habitual imperfections are, for example, a common custom of much speaking, or some attachment which we never wish entirely to conquer – such as that to a person, a garment, a book, a cell, a particular kind of food, tittle-tattle, fancies for tasting, knowing or hearing certain things, and such like.”⁶²

Certainly nothing could be more harmless than an attachment for a

59. *Ibid.*, I, 9.

60. *Loc. cit.*

61. *Ibid.*, I, 11.

62. *Loc. cit.*

garment or book; yet, according to the Saint, it prevents not only divine union, but *progress* in perfection. And à propos of the Critic's example (gratitude to a person and filial affection), notice that one of the *imperfections* that prevents spiritual progress is attachment to a person.⁶³

Of course the examples given by the Critic – I am sorry to have to say it – are simply silly. Is there any reason in the world why gratitude and filial affection could not be practiced for a supernatural motive? Would practicing them for such a motive be the equivalent of an “abandonment of all activity connected with the acquired natural virtues”? Would it mark a failure to “exercise this obligatory but still essentially natural activity”? Would they not rather be further ennobled, superelevated, transformed, deified by divine charity? And of course it is not the teaching of *Applied Christianity* to eliminate the natural virtues or natural activity; only to mortify natural motives and affections. But the Critic is led into such nonsense by his failure to distinguish natural motives from natural activity, the mortification of nature in the moral and spiritual order from its injury or destruction in the physical or ontological order.

It has been the consistent practice of these Critics, as soon as this matter of affection for creatures arises, to bring up at once the example of filial affection. Now clearly, when spiritual writers warn against attachments for creatures, they have in mind chiefly the vanities and pleasures of the world, the luxuries, and indulgences and comforts on which men fix their affections. Such is also in general my meaning. Still there is a sense in which we are to strip ourselves also of natural affections for persons, even those very close to us: as we have just seen, in the words of St. John of the Cross, a merely natural attachment for a person can stop all spiritual progress.

It is true, as the Critic says, that “some of the bitterest words of Our

63. This interpretation is confirmed by a recent introduction to the works of St. John of the Cross (*Journey in the Night*, Father Brice, O.P.), The author says:

“It is easy for the casual reader to interpret ‘imperfections’ as only certain desires. But I maintain that ‘imperfection’ in St. John means every natural desire . . . But, why does he call every natural desire an imperfection? First, because every natural desire is imperfect when compared to the least supernatural desire. Second, because natural desires are the causes of weakness and imperfection.” (pp. 50-61).

It is not surprising to learn that Father Brice's book, which is a faithful interpretation of the holy doctor's teaching, has been itself subject to attack. I would say to his Critic what I have said to my own. “Do not criticize Father Brice: criticize and answer St. John of the Cross.”

Lord recounted in the Gospels are those in which He rebukes the Pharisees for instructing their pupils that the natural love for parents should be replaced by some other concern". But then He also said, "If any man *hate* not his father and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple", (Luke 14, 26) No doubt, to understand the true meaning of these words spoken by Jesus, we must take both of these teachings together. He wished to enforce filial obligations, not to dispense from them. What then did He mean by *hating* father and mother? Certainly this at least: that our love for them should be as nothing in comparison with that of God. For "all the being of creation, then, compared with the infinite being of God, is nothing. And therefore the soul that sets its affections upon the being of creation is likewise nothing in the eyes of God".⁶⁴ Jesus's words are a demand for absolute, total exclusive love. Catholic theology reconciles such a demand with the obligations we owe our neighbors and relatives by teaching that charity requires us to love God for His own goodness, while we are to love our neighbors *on account of God*. That is to say, our formal motive in loving our neighbors and relatives is to be the goodness of God, as reflected in these persons: we are to love them without subtracting anything from our total love for God.

According to the Critic, by hating one's parents Jesus only meant that one should prefer God above parents. Now to prefer God above every creature is the very minimum degree of love acceptable to God: it is required for salvation. It is far less than loving God with our *whole* mind, our *whole* heart, our *whole* soul, our *whole* strength. Jesus, in expressing his demand for total love, uses a wild hyperbole – hating our parents –, the most vehement mode of speech of which even his passionate nature was capable. But the Critic sees in it no more than a demand for the minimum degree of love. Such is the diminution to which the Gospel is subject in those who do not like its "hard sayings".

What is asked for is a wholly supernatural love: which amounts to a renunciation, not of natural virtues, nor of the natural activity, but of merely natural motives of love. We are to love our parents, not because they are good to us, or socially prominent, or distinguished in appearance, or lavish in their generosity, but because they image the goodness of God, have been redeemed by Jesus, and are the providential instruments of our own creation and redemption. So Jesus loved His mother: His love for her was wholly supernatural. No doubt He loved her with the natural activity of His natural will. But the *principle* and *motive*

64. *Op. cit.*, I, 4.

of His action was supernatural. “Jesus is wholly supernatural in outlook.”⁶⁵ So it should be with us: the natural virtues and natural activities will remain: the natural views and natural motives ought to go.

I shall conclude these observations with another quotation from St. John of the Cross on natural affections for creatures in general:

“Wherefore our Savior said through St. Matthew: *non est bonus sumere panem filiorum, et mittere canibus*. That is: it is not meet to take the children’s bread and cast it to the dogs. And elsewhere, too, he says through the same Evangelist: *Nolite sanctum dare canibus*. Which signifies: Give not that which is holy unto the dogs. In these passages our Lord compares those who deny their creature desires, and prepare themselves to receive the spirit of God in purity, to the children of God; and those who would have their desires feed upon the creatures, to dogs. For it is given to children to eat with their father at table and from his dish, which is to feed upon his spirit, and to dogs are given the crumbs which fall from the table.

“From this we are to learn that all creatures are crumbs that have fallen from the table of God. Wherefore he that feeds ever upon the creatures is rightly called a dog, and therefore the bread is taken from the children, because they desire not to rise from feeding upon the crumbs, which are the creatures, to the table of the uncreated spirit of their Father.”⁶⁶

Such is the counsel of a Saint and Doctor. He would have the children eat of the Bread that is properly theirs and he warns them away from the love of creatures, which are food for the dogs. What perversity is it that causes theologians nowadays to warn the children away from the Bread and almost compels them to eat the food of dogs?

§ 4. Eat, Drink, and Carry Your Cross

In setting forth the doctrine of complete detachment from all affections for creatures, *Applied Christianity*, as the Critic notes offers two Scriptural texts as proofs. The first is:

“He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world keepeth it unto life eternal.” (John 12, 25)

65. Leen, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

66. *Op. cit.*, 1, 6.

The other:

“If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself and take us his cross and follow me.” (Luke 9, 2)

Now, according to the Critic, “neither of these texts has the slightest reference to an abandonment of all natural affections.” What then do they mean? According to him:

“The text from St. John teaches that the man who makes his own life his ultimate end in this world will be a failure, while the person who hates his life in this world (in the sense that a follower of Christ is expected to hate his own parents, that is, by preferring God to them), will set the service of God in charity before his own individual good, and will thus reap the reward of eternal life. The second text insists upon the necessity of continuing mortification. It does not teach that all natural affections are to be abandoned.”⁶⁷

The Critic offers no authority or corroboration for these interpretations of Scripture, even on a point of such decisive importance.

Now I consider it singularly providential that the Critic has given his interpretation of these texts. They clearly reveal, if further proof is needed, the spirit that inspires his attacks on the principles of *Applied Christianity*: the spirit of pious naturalism. This spirit defends nature, neglects the exigencies of grace. Above all it hates this doctrine of death to nature. We have already seen something of the theology by which it seeks to establish itself. The Critic now exposes the heart of the system and its hatred for the central mystery of Christianity.⁶⁸

I have no doubt that when the Critic says these texts do not require an abandonment of natural affections, he is again, in his confusion of terms, speaking of “affections”, in the ontological, not in the moral sense. That is, by natural affections he means, I suppose (the alternative interpretation would be even more damaging to him): the natural activity of the will, not the freely formed acts and habits, the motives and voluntary affections which are directed towards the objects of the will. I say this in simple fairness to him; as we have noticed right along, he makes no distinction of terms; and because *Applied Christianity* speaks of spiritual detachment, a renunciation of affections, he interprets it as an

67. See also the first *Reply* for a description of this system.

68. *Op. cit.*, p. 60.

abandonment or mortification of nature in the ontological sense, an interpretation which, as we have seen, the book expressly guarded against.

Still, that the Critic, as was said above, does not understand that I am speaking of the moral sphere of activity, together with the fact that he is not aware of any right and orthodox sense in which Catholics may speak of a renunciation of affections for creatures, indicates how defective is his grasp of spiritual doctrine, how completely incompetent he is to expound the moral teaching contained in the above texts. He speaks as a philosopher, as a pagan philosopher would speak in expounding the excellence of nature; but he knows nothing about the Gospel and the central mystery of the Gospel: the doctrine of the Cross. That is why he says that the natural activity of the will – natural affections in the ontological sense – are not to be abandoned: which of course I never doubted. *Applied Christianity* is talking about something else; it is not teaching philosophy: it is teaching spiritual doctrine, summoning Catholics to moral and spiritual effort. But the Critic, knowing only philosophy, uses his knowledge to release souls from any higher, specifically supernatural, spiritual effort. We see much of this new religion of today: Christianity without the Cross. Usually, however, we see it among sensualists, worldlings, the lovers of this world. Here it is, however, with high theological sanction. Only remember, before adopting it, that “He that seeks not the cross of Christ seeks not the glory of Christ.”⁶⁹

These words may seem harsh. To show that this is not so, but that my statements are a matter of simple truth, let us first consider the Critic’s interpretation of the above decisively important texts and compare it with that of a recognized spiritual master.

The doctrine of the cross as given by St. Luke, the Critic says, “insists upon the necessity of continuing mortification.” What is meant by “continuing mortification” is not stated. It may mean much or it may mean very little. It is for that reason a convenient phrase, vague enough to permit a retreat in any direction. But of this we can be certain: the Critic intends to mitigate what he deems the rigor of *Applied Christianity*; so that “continuing mortification”, in his usage, does not mean complete and universal detachment nor the renunciation of all natural affections.

His interpretation of the words from St. John perhaps give us some positive notion of the sort of mortification and detachment that he would

69. St. John of the Cross, *Points of Love*, No. 23.(Complete Works, Vol. III, p.251)

encourage. These words, he says, show that “the man who makes his own life his ultimate end is a failure...” Now, according to the teaching of St. Thomas, when we take any creature as our ultimate end, we commit mortal sin. That is what mortal sin is: taking a creature, instead of the Creator, as ultimate end. Thus, according to the Critic, the text from St. John simply means that we should avoid mortal sin: when we do this, we fulfill the meaning of that text. This interpretation is born out by the rest of his words. When St. John speaks of *hating* our life, the Critic says this means simply that we are to prefer God to our own life, as we are to prefer God to all other creatures, including our parents. Thus, all that God wants from us is a love of simple preference, not the love of complete surrender; the loving of God over creatures, and not the loving of God with our whole heart; the minimum acceptable degree of love and not the maximum total love.

In other words the Critic sees in the doctrine of the cross only an affirmation that we should avoid mortal sin, a standard of conduct which, at least so far as the natural law is concerned, is observed also by good pagans. The only love that God wants from us, he thinks, is that involved in keeping the Decalogue: the minimum degree of love. Like the Pharisees, he has forgotten that commandment about loving God with our whole heart.

Such a teaching is a direct assault on the doctrine of the Cross. It eliminates the Cross. Not only does it see in the command of Jesus to deny ourselves and carry the cross no more than an exhortation to avoid grave sin, but, in thus diminishing the teaching reported by St. John, it denies the central mystery of the Cross which Jesus is in these words expounding to His apostles on the very eve of His passion: it is the mystery of life coming from death; of the seed dying in the ground to bring forth new life; of Jesus, the grain of wheat, dying to give us divine life; of ourselves, His members united to Him, also dying to our natural lives in order to possess the divine life. Men could have had a natural standard of morality without the Cross. Men once did have such a standard without the Cross. The importance to be attached to this attitude of the Critic towards the cross may be seen from the statement of Pourrat that:

“The whole of the ascetic doctrine of the Gospel is summed up in these words of Jesus Christ: ‘If any man will come after me (i.e., will be my disciple), let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.’”⁷⁰

Newman says, along the same lines, that “the great and awful

doctrine of the Cross of Christ... may fitly be called in the language of figure, the *heart* of religion.” So that in removing the Cross from Christianity, the Critic – and the devotees of pious naturalism in general – are removing the heart from Christianity. And again, as Newman said, the Cross “is the measure of the world” and of all that is in the world. This being so, it is the measure of the Critic’s philosophy also. Do you wish to appraise the value of his system? “Gaze upon the Cross!”⁷¹

Let us now look at the interpretation of the above two texts as given by St. John of the Cross. He certainly understands them to mean total detachment and the renunciation of all affections for creatures; and he uses them as the basis for his own teaching on that score. And it is significant to note, before considering these passages, that the Saint is here talking, not only about detachment from natural affections or sensible creatures, but also about a deeper, more terrible, and more penetrating detachment from all spiritual consolations, such as are sometimes experienced by devout souls. The Saint quotes these texts as they are given by St. Mark (8, 34-35):

“If any man will follow My road let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For he that will save his life shall lose it; but he that loses it for My sake, shall gain it.”

Then he comments:

“Oh, that one might show us how to understand, practise and experience what this counsel is which our Saviour here gives us concerning the denial of ourselves, so that spiritual persons might see in how different a way they should conduct themselves upon this road from that which many of them think proper! For they believe that any kind of retirement or reformation of life suffices; and others are content with practising the virtues and continuing in prayer and pursuing mortification; but they attain not to detachment and poverty or denial or spiritual purity (which are all one), which the Lord here commends to us; for they prefer feeding and clothing their natural selves with spiritual feelings and consolations, to stripping themselves of all things, and denying themselves all things, for God’s sake. For they think that it suffices to deny themselves worldly things without annihilating and purifying themselves of spiritual

70. *Christian spirituality*, (London: Burns Oates), I, p. 1.

71. *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, VI, p. 89.

attachment. Wherefore it comes to pass that, when there presents itself to them any of this solid and perfect spirituality, consisting of the annihilation of all sweetness in God, in aridity, distaste and trial, which is the true spiritual cross, and the detachment of the spiritual poverty of Christ, they flee from it as from death, and seek only sweetness and delectable communion with God. This is not self-denial and detachment of spirit, but spiritual gluttony. Herein they become spiritually enemies of the cross of Christ; for true spirituality seeks for God's sake that which is distasteful rather than that which is delectable; and inclines itself rather to suffering than to consolation..."

As to the other doctrine, that he who would save his life must gain it, the Saint has this to say:

"Oh, that someone would tell us how far Our Lord desires this self-denial to be carried! It must certainly be like to death and annihilation, temporal, natural, and spiritual, in all things that the will esteems, wherein consists all self-denial. And it is this that Our Lord meant when He said: He that will save his life the same shall lose it; and he that loses his soul for My sake, the same shall gain it. That is to say: He that for Christ's sake renounces all that his will can desire and enjoy, and chooses that which is most like to the Cross (which the Lord Himself, through St. John describes as hating his soul), the same shall gain it. And this His Majesty taught to those a disciples who went and begged Him for a place on His right hand and on His left; when giving them no reply to their request for such glory, He offered them the cup which He had to drink, as a thing more precious and more secure upon this earth than its fruition.

"This cup is the death of the natural self, which is attained through the soul's detachment and annihilation in order that the soul may travel by this narrow path, with respect to all that can belong to it according to sense..."⁷²



I have had to notice, in various places how the Critic fails to offer evidence or authority for his statements. By this time the importance of

72. *Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, II, 7.

this omission should have become apparent. He claims to speak for the central tradition of Catholic spirituality, yet his spirit and doctrine are obviously wholly alien to that spirit. His is the spirit of pious naturalism. In meeting the charges of the former Critic, as of this one also, I have not contented myself with explaining the doctrine of *Applied Christianity* but have submitted a host of the most unimpeachable witnesses for all that I have said. The Critics charged me with departing from the central tradition of Christian spirituality; and therefore I adopted this procedure, although it meant drawing out my answers to great length, in order to demonstrate that what I had written is wholly in line with that tradition and is inspired by it.

And having followed such a procedure, let me say this both to the former and the present Critic, as to any other who may in the future assume that office: where is *your* evidence? If you claim to speak for the spiritual tradition of the Church, substantiate that claim. In all this controversy you have scarcely quoted from one spiritual author, from one illustrious teacher of spiritual doctrine.⁷³ The references you have given to support your statements are to text books in theology. I do not doubt the soundness or excellence of these text books; but the principles they expound are chiefly those of speculative theology; they are not concerned with its practical application, not with ascetical principles. They were not written by the Church's great masters of spiritual doctrine. Even these, as I have had to point out, both in the former *Reply* and in this one, you have quoted them one-sidedly and misleadingly, emphasizing one aspect of a truth at the expense of another. And in any case, the speculative principles which you draw from them are not at issue. The battle is on other grounds; it is in the sphere of applied morals; it concerns the practical application of the Gospel.

The evidence that is desired here is the doctrine taught by the masters of the spiritual life and of the great directors of souls. Cite especially canonized saints, whose lives are the proof of their doctrines, and the Doctors who have been designated by the Church as our teachers: in this way you can establish your claim to speak for traditional spirituality. Cite such authors as I have been quoting, both in this *Reply* and the former one, to witness to every principle that I have set forth – St. Alphonsus, St. Francis de Sales, St. John of the Cross, St. Thomas Aquinas. Or cite those other authors, stars of the second magnitude, such

73. The only such citation was by the former Critic to Father Garrigou-Lagrange. It was a brief statement concerning the conditions required for merit and did not conflict in the least with *Applied Christianity*.

as Grou, Lallemand, de Caussade, Baker, à Kempis, Scupoli, or, among contemporaries, Leen, Marmion, Garrigou-Lagrange. Although not canonized, these men write in the spirit and tradition of the saints. They understand, not merely the cold definition of doctrine, but its living application. They understand, not only Christian thinking, but also (what is much rarer) Christian living. They understand, not only the structure of Christianity, but its dynamism; they know how its principles operate, or ought to operate, in practice. I have been using them also to substantiate my statements. But you have not been able to cite even them. Let us see you do so. Then I will listen. I am not interested in your own bald unproved statements, especially as they are in almost every case in direct conflict with the teaching of the spiritual masters.

The only evidence that is acceptable here is that of the masters of the spiritual life. So far you have not shown a scrap of it. Let us see you do so. As St. Peter Alcantara said to St. Teresa, reprimanding her for seeking the advice on spiritual matters of theologians, rather than of masters of the spiritual life:

“I assure you that I was very much surprised to find you were referring to the judgment of theologians a question with which they have nothing to do. If matters of law or cases of conscience were at stake, it would be right to take the opinion of jurists or of theologians; but when it is a question of perfection, we have only to consult those who practise it. Usually, indeed, conscience and pious dispositions are in harmony with the works that men do.”⁷⁴

Let us then see you corroborate your statements from spiritual authors who are acquainted, not only with philosophy and natural ethics, but with Christian perfection. Let us hear you quote such authors to the effect that we are *not* to get rid of natural motives, *not* to mortify natural attachments or affections for creatures, not to fight against the human spirit. Now observe what I say: I do not want the statement of a mere philosopher, or of a theologian speaking on the philosophical level, that human nature, reason, the natural activity of the will, or any other natural activity, is good.⁷⁵

I know that. I take such elementary truths for granted. They are not at issue. What I want you to produce, what I challenge you to produce, are statements that, in the moral sphere, natural attachments, motives, and affections are not only morally good at the natural level, but desirable on

74. Quoted from Pourrat, *op. cit.*, III, 111.

the supernatural level. I would like to see some passages from the spiritual masters, not only permitting as morally blameless, but also exhorting to, as spiritually desirable, the cultivation of such natural desires, affections, motives, and attachments.

I will go further still. Let me see you produce one such authority, just one saint, Doctor of the Church, or recognized master of the spiritual life. JUST ONE; no more. Then I will be silent, then I will acknowledge defeat, then I will retract my “errors” – publicly, if you wish in the columns of the *Ecclesiastical Review*, which might, then at least, be offered to me.

§ 5.

Confusion (continued)

The Critic’s next objection⁷⁶ is similar to one that we have already considered. It is simply a variation of the theme running throughout these criticisms, the theme being that *Applied Christianity* would have us abandon *natural* activity. In this case the Critic is concerned lest natural *law* should suffer from the emphasis given by *Applied Christianity* to the supernatural life. He affirms that “natural acts are governed by a natural law, and that Christians are commanded to obey this natural law under

75. Immediately after the critic’s article in the January *Ecclesiastical Review*, there is a short quotation, evidently intended as a fitting pendant, from the *Conferences* of cardinal Mercier, in which the Cardinal advises his readers, “You must stifle neither your affections nor your desires.” Obviously, however, the great Cardinal is using the words “affections and desires” in the ontological sense, i.e. to refer to the natural activity of the will. This is clear from the context, which is talking about individual traits of character, natural talents and gifts. The sense is that these are to be used in the service of God. It is in this sense also that *Applied Christianity* says that natural activity is not to be mortified.

As pointed out repeatedly, this is not the issue in the present controversy. I have shown how, at the beginning, *Applied Christianity* takes special pains to preclude the possibility of its moral exhortations being understood in an ontological sense. The reader may find, too, as a footnote in the very chapter from which the offending doctrine is taken, this reminder to the reader: “When we speak here of the death and destruction of the natural man, word ‘natural’ must be understood in reference to our explanation in Part I, Chapter 3. – The *substance* of our nature always remains. This destruction or the natural in us is moral, i.e., a destruction of our merely human dreams, desires, aspirations, ambitions, attachments. These things being attractive to us, giving them up is a kind of death.” *Applied Christianity*, p.87 [p. 91 our edition].

76. *Op. cit.*, pp. 64-85. Italics in the following citations are mine.

penalty of sin.” He apparently thinks that *Applied Christianity* is attacking the *natural law* or would dispense Christians from observance of the natural law! So he bravely aims at this cardboard soldier.

But if a man observes the supernatural law, as *Applied Christianity* urges its readers, would he thereby neglect the natural law? Does not the greater include the less, the whole contain the part? Those who live by the higher law of love, scarcely need the natural law except as a guide to God’s will. St. Augustine said, as is well known, “Love God and do what you will!” I know that this advice is frequently abused, that it is taken as an invitation to license by the carnal-minded who do not love God. But for spiritual minds it contains a great truth. Love is a union of wills: to love God is to unite our wills to His. And so long as we unite our wills to His is there any danger of our sinning against the natural law? On the contrary, were we able to unite our wills to His continually, we would not fall into even the slightest imperfection. *Applied Christianity*, it is true, does not devote much space to urging people to keep the natural law; but that is because of the fact that those who live a supernatural life, according to its counsel, will amply fulfill the requirements of the natural law.

Moreover, as I have shown, just as it is possible to retain the natural virtues physically while practicing them from a supernatural motive, so is it possible to observe the precepts of the natural law, according to their substantially natural requirements, but from the supernatural motive of charity. Are Christians to be discouraged from keeping the commandments out of love?

On the contrary, it is the plan and the law of God that love should be their motive. For, remember, a motive is the will’s grip on a good, chosen as an end. And the end of all God’s commandments – hence the motive that should impel their observance – is charity: “Now the end of the commandment is charity, *finis præcepti caritas est.*” (I Tim. 1, 5) St. Thomas, explaining this text, says that it is the intent of every law, *omnis lex intendit*, to establish love, both among men and between man and God, hence the twofold law of charity.⁷⁷ And accordingly, as he says elsewhere, the precepts of the Decalogue are placed in this basic code because they lead directly to the love of God and neighbor.⁷⁸

The Critic’s error, again, results from his altogether consistent confusion of natural activity in the physical sense with natural activity (i.e., natural motives and affections) in the moral sense. Because *Applied*

77. See I II, 99, 1 ad 2.

78. II II, 170, 1, c.

Christianity urges souls to give up natural motives and natural affections for creatures, he concludes, with an audacity that transcends all logic, that it would have them abandon all physical natural activity and that it would exempt them from the practice of the natural virtues and the observance of the natural law! You will notice the confusion of terms, the jumbling together of distinct concepts, in the following passages.

Having said, as just quoted, “that natural *acts* are governed by a natural *law*, and that Christians are commanded to obey this natural law under pain of sin,” he goes on to say in the following sentence:

“Some of the natural *affections* and the natural *motives* to which he [i.e., the author of *Applied Christianity*] refers are made obligatory by the very force of this *law*.”

Notice the breath taking leap from the physical (or ontological) to the moral order, from natural *acts* and natural law to natural *affections* and natural *motives*. No doubt, certain natural acts are prescribed for Christians by the natural law. But where is the proof that they must be performed from a natural *motive*? That therefore natural *motives* are obligatory? is not charity the end – and therefore the motive – of every law? Supernatural motives are *always* better than natural motives; we are *never* required to renounce a supernatural motive for one that is natural. And as for natural affections for creatures, well, it would be interesting to know what St. John of the Cross would say upon learning, from an eminent theologian, that the natural affections he condemned so roundly as “contrary” to God,⁷⁹ are in truth prescribed by the natural law!

Here is another example of the same confusion:

“As a matter of fact he [i.e., the Christian] could not fulfill the law of charity without obeying the very *natural law* which prescribes certain *acts* and *motives* which are themselves within the natural order.”

There is no doubt that the Christian must observe the natural *law* and perform certain natural *acts* prescribed by that law. But the Critic has yet to demonstrate that he must do so out of natural *motives*. I am afraid that the Critic has missed his jump!

Here is one last, unexcelled example of such illogical jumping back

79. *Op. cit.*, I, 4. “... darkness, which is affection for creatures, and light, which is God, are contrary to each other, and have no likeness or accord between one another.” (See above, § 3.)

and forth:

“If then we are to designate as natural those *activities* and those *motives* which are prescribed by the natural *law*, we have no right whatsoever to teach that we should give up all of this natural *activity* and all of these natural *motives* in order to live the life of charity.

We will return to this method of logic a little later in the discussion.

It may be well, before leaving this subject, to explain why *Applied Christianity* neglects to put much emphasis on the natural law – a fact that in some measure may account for the wrong conclusions drawn by the Critic. It is not that the book would dispense from obedience to the natural law; nor again, as we have seen, because of any opposition it finds between the Decalogue and charity. Why then? Well, one reason has already been given: obedience to the supernatural law of love includes obedience to the natural law: “love is the fulfillment of the law.” (Rom. 33, 10) Let us add two further considerations.

First of all, although obedience to the laws of the Decalogue may be an expression of love for God, this is not necessarily so. One may obey these commandments from another motive; nor is charity, according to St. Thomas, *necessarily* involved in such obedience. Thus he says, showing that the mode or manner in which the commandments should be kept, i.e., out of charity, does not fall under the Decalogue:

“And therefore it is true that the modality, charity (*modus caritatis*), does not fall under the precept. That is to say, in the precept, ‘Honor thy father,’ it is not implied that one’s father should be honored out of charity but only that he should be honored. Accordingly, one who honors his father, although lacking in charity, does not violate that precept, although he does violate the precept that requires an act of charity and merits punishment for this transgression.”⁸⁰

Canon Saudreau shows how a man may be prevented from grave sins against the Decalogue, not only without charity, but even by the growth of some contrary evil passion:

“Just as a solitary tree grows to a vast size, while if crowded amongst others in the forest it does not spread itself abroad, so certain vices are impeded and arrested in their development by

80. I II, 100, 10, c.

other contrary vices. Thus, avarice can keep a man from going far in debauchery; again and more frequently still, the passion of honour and the care for reputation will make him avoid many an error. How many souls resist their evil inclinations in this way, and without much merit prevent them from acquiring that ascendancy which they otherwise would do! It is clear that those who meet with no other obstacles than these in the way of evil are apt to go far in sin, and, though they may preserve certain external decencies, are at bottom extremely bad.”⁸¹

Obviously, then, mere formal obedience to the strict requirements of the Decalogue is not enough. People must be taught to obey out of charity, out of love. And yet in our practical instruction, this commandment of love, the first and the greatest commandment, is the one that is chiefly neglected in catechism instructions it is given briefly, mentioned and memorized, but scarcely any more is heard of it. Its relation to the other commandments as the form and soul that should inspire all moral effort, the end and motive that should direct all activity, is scarcely spoken of; while the greatest emphasis and most detailed consideration is given to the specific requirements of the precepts of the Decalogue. It is one of the purposes of *Applied Christianity* to correct this tendency by a proper and proportionate emphasis on the first and greatest commandment, the commandment whose observance is “the fulfillment of the law.”

And this leads us to the second reason why *Applied Christianity* is not content with inculcating the precepts of the Decalogue. For while obedience to these precepts may and ought to be an expression of charity, it is but the minimum expression of charity. One who observes them out of love, but does no more, is doing the very least. He is loving God above every creature, since he abstains from taking any creature as his end, but he is still far from loving God with his *whole* heart, *whole* mind, *whole* soul, *whole* strength.

By the avoidance of mortal sin through obedience to the Decalogue, a man clears his soul of all that is directly *contrary* and wholly incompatible with the love of God, thus disposing himself for an infusion of charity. But there are heights of love beyond this to which he may and ought to aspire. What are these heights? To clear his soul, not only of that which is directly opposed to and incompatible with charity, but also of whatever in any measure or degree *hinders* the affections of his soul from

81. *Op. cit.*, I, 4-5.

rising quickly and easily and totally to God. Let me summarize this teaching in the words of St. Thomas, from whom it is drawn.

“And such perfection as this [i.e., as is involved in excluding all that is repugnant to the movement of love for God] can be possessed in this life. One way of doing this is by the exclusion from one’s affections of whatever is *contrary* to charity, that is, mortal sin. Another way is by the exclusion not only of that which is *contrary* to charity, but also of all that *hinders* one’s affections from being *totally* directed to God.”⁸²

What are these obstacles which prevent our soul from being directed totally to God and which we ought therefore to remove? St. Thomas does not specify. In developing this doctrine, therefore, it has been my practice to explain it from St. Francis de Sales, in the belief that there is no sure method of arriving at sound spiritual doctrine than by allowing one saint to comment on another.

The *Introduction to a Devout Life* details in the first part the preliminary steps by which souls are to be introduced into a devout life. These steps the Saint calls purgations. The first purgation is that from mortal sin, while the second is that from affection to mortal sin. These two purgations correspond to the first mode or degree of charity spoken of by St. Thomas: the removal from the soul of what is directly *opposed* to charity. But then St. Francis goes further. The third purgation is from venial sin and affection to such sin: now the soul is working to remove not only what is directly opposed to charity, but also what prevents its love from going totally to God. But still the Saint has not finished. There is another purgation from evil inclinations, and one from “*affection* to vain and unprofitable amusements”.

This last mentioned purgation is of special interest here, because it is in speaking of it that the Saint develops his teaching on *affections* for creatures:

“Play, dancing, feasting, dress, and theatrical shows, being things which, considered in their substance, are not evil, but indifferent, but such as may be used either well or ill; nevertheless as all these things are dangerous, to bear an *affection* to them is still more dangerous. I say then, Philothea, that although it be lawful to play, to dance, to dress, to feast, or to be present at *innocent* comedies, yet to have an *affection* to such thing is *not only*

82. II II, 184, c.

contrary to devotion, but also extremely hurtful and dangerous.”⁸³

We have seen that St. John of the Cross says affections for creatures are contrary to the love of God. Here, the mild St. Francis, speaking to beginners, goes even further: they are not only contrary to devotion (which, to him, is love in action), but are *extremely hurtful and dangerous*. Obviously there are heights of holiness beyond fidelity to the natural law! And who are expected to scale these heights? Well, St. Francis is recommending these purgations, not to contemplatives, not to souls who are already on the mystic heights, but to beginners, to those who are *about to enter* a devout life. In urging souls, even ordinary souls, to go beyond the requirements of the Decalogue, *Applied Christianity* is working in the central tradition of Christian spirituality, the tradition of the saints. That such a procedure should seem unusual to the Critic demonstrates again how little able he is to speak for that tradition.

§ 6. Zealous for the Lesser Things

The next objection⁸⁴ has to do with the difference between natural and supernatural love for God. The Critic points out that there is a natural love for God, required of all men, as well as the supernatural love for Him which is proper to Christians. Such a natural love for God would involve, in practice, keeping of the Decalogue and the practice of the natural virtues. Any one observing this natural justice would be a virtuous man indeed.

So far the Critic; and in all of this he is right; nor is there in *Applied Christianity* anything contrary to these *speculative* truths. What, then, is the point of his criticism? This, that, in the opinion of the Critic, *Applied Christianity* disparages this natural love and the natural justice that is its result. Although the book speaks about a “good pagan”, this gentleman does not seem to possess the required natural love of God, and therefore is not really good. In practice, he seems to be ruled by a love of creatures. To the Critic, such a man would not be a “good” pagan, at all, but a sinner. Thus he says:

“Natural activity in the concrete [as conceived by *Applied Christianity*] is presented as something which is essentially and necessarily dominated by love of creatures, while the supernatu-

83. I, 23.

84. *Op. cit.*, pp. 65-66.

ral seems to differ from it in being dominated by the love of God.”

If the Critic is right in this analysis, then no allowance is made for the natural love of God. The good pagan is dominated by the love of creatures. Thus the Critic says:

“Fr. Hugo’s good pagan, who abstains from sensual indulgence while centering his affections on created things to the exclusion of God, is, in the last analysis, just as truly in a state of sin as the fellow who lives like an animal, indulging himself in sensual pleasures.”

The Critic then goes on to show, correctly, that even by natural standards, a man is required to prefer God to creatures; so that if he is ruled by a love of creatures he is violating the natural law, he is not even a good pagan. This being so, the Critic concludes:

“*Applied Christianity* ... definitely leaves the impression that the supernatural order is above all something which merely fills the gap which original sin produced in the natural order of human activity. Natural activity, in the concrete, is represented as dominated by a love of creatures. The supernatural order is dominated by the love of God. Since man should naturally love his Creator, it would be only legitimate to infer that the love which comes in the life of grace is simply a replacement for the affection which would have been within the competence of natural activity were it not for the tragedy of original sin.”

If the Critic is right, then *Applied Christianity* at once precludes the possibility of a natural love for God, since it holds a pessimistic opinion of nature, and also, under cover of praising supernatural love, really rejects this also, through conceiving it merely as a replacement for the natural love missing from its system. Although the Critic does not say so, this reduction of grace and charity to the natural order, is the error of Jansenism. He has me, as you see, on the edge of an abyss. Let us see who goes over.

In the first place I admit that the truths, the speculative or hypothetical truths (I shall in a moment explain why I thus describe them) which he sets down are correct. I do not question them; nor is there anything in *Applied Christianity* contrary to them.

Secondly, I admit that there is little said in the book about the natural love of God. But I think there is sufficient reason for that omission. I am

not a philosopher attempting to construct a complete rational system. I am only a priest exhorting a few souls to the love of God. And of course, being a priest, a Catholic priest, a priest of Jesus Christ, it is the charity of Christ, the supernatural love of God, that I have in mind. But then, as I have explained in the preceding section, I am confident that the natural love of God, as the end of creation, does not suffer from this emphasis on the supernatural love of Him as our Father, our Friend, our Lover, our Beatitude. The whole includes the part; and he who fulfills the law of supernatural love transcends infinitely the requirements fixed by the law of nature.

But having conceded this much I stop. Once more the Critic shows no practical grasp of the problem he is attempting to deal with; as I shall show, he has no knowledge of how even this natural love of God is to be realized *in practice*. And his analysis of the teaching of *Applied Christianity* is again false; he has once more created a cardboard soldier to play with. Let us first consider this faulty analysis.

In saying, for example, that in *Applied Christianity* “natural activity in the concrete is presented as something which is *essentially* and necessarily dominated by the love of creatures”, he is saying something that simply is not true; and I would defy him to quote from the book even one passage where that is said. Good pagans, no less than Christians, tend to the love of creatures as a result of concupiscence, but their activity is not *necessarily* and *essentially* dominated by the love of creatures. Their condition is a *de facto* one, not a necessary one; nor is there any hint whatever in the book that this tendency to worldliness (and finally to evil) is *essential* to human nature. *Applied Christianity* is dealing with men in the concrete; it speaks of them as they will be found in practice, that is of their *de facto* condition; but it does not say that this condition is necessary. That is pure calumny. Here is what the book says: (p. 28 [p. 32 our edition])

“A natural life is one that, *at any rate in practical conduct*, is ruled by the love of creatures; thus a man who lives a natural (selfish) life and falls into many imperfections and venial sins allows his conduct to be ruled in practice by the love of creatures, even though he does not yet turn wholly away from God by mortal sin.”

It is Jansenism to say that human nature is *essentially* corrupted and therefore *necessarily* sins apart from grace. It is Catholic doctrine to say that concupiscence, the result of original sin, which gives us all a proneness to sin, will, unless mortified and checked, come to influence

and rule our lives *in practice*. We are ruled *in practice*, the book says, by the love of creatures when we commit deliberate and habitual venial sin, although still not committing mortal sin. We commit mortal sin when we choose a creature, in preference to the Creator, as a final end; then we are ruled by the love of creatures, not only in our practical conduct, but perfectly and completely, in our mind and heart and the very center of our soul.

Notice, then, that one who lives a natural life as here defined, is not *necessarily* ruled by love of creatures, nor does he commit mortal sin. Concupiscence is necessary in the sense that all men are born with it, retain it throughout life, and experience the tendency to evil that it causes. But they are *free* to combat and, in great measure, overcome that tendency. This they can do by corresponding with grace and living a supernatural life; but then they will not be pagans. – Contrast this with the Critic’s description of the book’s teaching:

“Father Hugo’s good pagan, who abstains from sensual indulgence while centering his affections on created things to the exclusion of God is, in the last analysis, just as truly in a state of sin as the fellow who lives like an animal, indulging himself in sensual pleasure.”

This is not “Fr. Hugo’s good pagan”. I do not know the fellow. This is the Critic’s good pagan, a veritable monster who is doubled up in a way truly incredible. How, for example, can he abstain from sensual indulgence while centering his affections on created things? One who centers his affections on created things is in that very act not abstaining from, but obviously indulging, sensuality. More wonderful still, this remarkably double-jointed pagan abstains from sensuality while centering his affections on creatures *to the exclusion of God*. Now to choose a creature to the exclusion of God is, by definition, a mortal sin. The man whom the Critic is describing is a sinner, not a pagan. So that the Critic can truly say that “he is just as much a sinner as the fellow, etc.” But neither let the Critic think this is the “good pagan” spoken of by *Applied Christianity*.

A good pagan, a perfectly good pagan, would be one who wholly fulfills the natural law and practices all the natural virtues. I say “would be” for such a pagan is only a theoretical possibility. Pagans, not less than Christians, as we have said, are subject to concupiscence: sensuality, vanity, and egoism will find a way, however subtly, into their actions, too. Although they observe the substantial duties of natural law, they are deflected, more or less, by their human weakness, from natural perfection. So that the good pagan, in practice, cannot be other than one

who, observing the natural law in its essence, is nevertheless moved by concupiscence to a love of creatures. Of course I do not believe that such a pagan as this (supposing that he remains a pagan) will retain even this relative goodness *for long*. It is a doctrine of the Church that no one can perfectly fulfill over a long period of time the entire natural law – apart from grace and, of course, correspondence with grace, i.e. supernatural effort. So that this good pagan's relative goodness will sooner or later collapse unless his love of creatures is checked by mortification performed in correspondence with divine grace. For him to keep all his goodness permanently unimpaired amidst the influences of the world, the flesh, the devil, would be as marvelous as if a cake of ice were to remain intact under a burning summer sun. Still, while he lasts he is a pleasant and interesting chap. Just as the ice is refreshing while it lasts; and even his temporary existence serves as a useful and concrete pedagogical device for contrasting the natural with the supernatural order – as well as a warning to those Christians who are living their life on the primrose path of this world's pleasures.

The actual conditions created by concupiscence should serve to explain that combination of elements in the description given by *Applied Christianity* of the natural life and the good pagan – the combination that so disturbs the Critic. There is, first of all, the essential goodness of human nature, and the excellence of human powers, which, at least in some measure, are capable of fulfilling the natural law. Then there is the action of concupiscence which tends to produce love of creatures and self-indulgence, and also to prevent a perfect fulfillment of the natural law. The Critic is unable to combine these elements. He does not think of the practical aspect of the problem at all. His thinking is wholly confined to the speculative sphere. He draws up a perfect picture of natural virtue, natural goodness, natural love; and then he scolds because he does not find that picture in *Applied Christianity*. Well, where will he find it? in the Blessed Virgin Mary, to be sure. But in no one else, as I am fully convinced.

No doubt there is such a thing as natural goodness and natural love of God; but, in their perfection, they are – apart from grace and the supernatural life – only a theoretical possibility. And *Applied Christianity*, as the man suggests, is intended to be a practical book. St. Thomas speaks of this natural love, and he proposes this question concerning it: "Whether man can love God above all things with his natural powers alone and apart from grace?" And his answer is an interesting comment on the Critic's complete inability to treat of the moral world as it actually is. In the first place, he says it *would* be certainly possible for man to love

God above all things, with his natural powers alone, and apart from grace, in the state of integral nature; that is, in such a state as that enjoyed by Adam and Eve before the Fall, wherein their natural powers were unimpaired and they were immuned from concupiscence. But what about us? What about men as they are? Does the fact that our nature is fallen make a difference? Can we love God above all things with our natural powers alone? The Saint answers:

“*But* in the state of fallen nature, man falls short of this [i.e., perfect love of God and of all other things in reference to God] by reason of the appetite of his rational will, which, owing to the corruption of nature, follows its own private good unless it is repaired by the grace of God.”⁸⁵

Of course, grace only becomes operative in our lives when we correspond with it; and to correspond with it is, so far, to live a supernatural life. So that the only way to perfect one’s self even in natural love of God is to live a supernatural life! Moreover, so far as love of God involves obedience to His commands, that is, so far as love is what theologians call *effective*⁸⁶ – it is similarly not possible, according to St. Thomas and the whole of Catholic teaching, for anyone, with his natural powers alone apart from grace, to fulfill perfectly and over a period of time, all the precepts of the natural law. It was possible, even without grace, although grace was there, in the state of integrity. But it is not possible now. So that, again, paradoxically, in order to live a perfectly good natural life, it is necessary really to live a supernatural life; and one who does this faithfully will scarcely need to be anxious whether or not he is transgressing the natural law of love!

Perhaps this will explain to the Critic why the good pagan of *Applied Christianity* limps a little. *His* good pagan is perfect: but then he is an abstraction. And the only alternative that the Critic can imagine is mortal sin – this is the sin mentality – and it’s necessary and immediate alternative. So he says:

“... Any love of creatures to the exclusion of God, or any pref-

85. I II, 109, 3, c.

86. Theologians distinguish *affective* from *effective* love. The former is an act of the will choosing God as first principle and last end, and including a firm resolve of pleasing God in all things and avoiding at least what is grievously evil. *Effective* love is the actual carrying out of the resolve contained in affective love: it is a keeping of the divine commands and therefore involves a whole series of actions.

erence of a creature for God, must be classed as something evil, even by purely natural standards.”

Let me add: such a love of creatures as this must not only be classed as evil, but as grievously evil: to prefer creatures to God is mortal sin. But one can love creatures – as in attachments, imperfections, and venial faults – without going to the extremity of preferring creatures to God. And that is what *my* poor pagan does, in his brief hour upon the stage.



The reader should now be able to see for himself the falsity of the Critic’s conclusion, quoted above, i.e., that the supernatural love spoken of in *Applied Christianity* is not really supernatural at all but is “simply a replacement for the affection which would have been within the competence of natural activity were it not for the tragedy of original sin.” When the walls of a house are torn down, the roof also collapses; here also, by demolishing the premises, the conclusion falls, natural love of God is not denied: but the practical difficulties of realizing it are taken into account; and the emphasis is given to supernatural love, through the practice of which natural love itself is purified and perfected.

Of course, even granting the Critic’s premises, it is hard to see how his conclusion would follow. It is simply directly counter to the obvious characteristics of the teaching in *Applied Christianity*. The central and essential point of that teaching is that man is elevated by grace, not only over the level of sin and evil, but also over the level of *good* natural activity: he is divinized, deified, raised to the divine plane, is now a Son of God, with all the responsibilities that such an immense dignity implies. The scheme by which the lesson is brought home to the reader is, according to the Critic himself, “very effective”. How then can he accuse me of denying or compromising what is very effectively set forth? How can he accuse me of denying what it is the central and essential purpose of the book to affirm? How can he accuse me of compromising the theme that is found in a multitude of variations, just as life is manifested in a multitude of cells and members, in every chapter of the book?

The truth is that supernatural grace does two things for us: it elevates us to the supernatural plane; it also acts medicinally on the effects of sin. For this reason theologians distinguish two types of grace, *gratia elevans* and *gratia medicinalis*. Of course they are both the same grace, sanctifying grace, but they are distinguished according to the two distinct effects that this one kind of grace has in the soul. For sanctifying grace

does two things for us: it washes away sin and cures us of the vestiges of sin; it also elevates us to the supernatural order to give us a share of divine life. It does not do these things separately or at different times; it does them at one and the same instant of time, and, so long as it resides in us, it continuously produces these two effects in us: it acts medicinally to help us overcome sin, and it at the same time elevates us above nature.

As already noted, however, grace produces its effects only when we correspond with it. Thus we have a twofold purpose in corresponding with grace: first that we may live on the supernatural plane, secondly that we may overcome sin and its effects. And while these effects actually go on together in our souls, the limitations of human thought and speech compel us to distinguish them and treat of them separately. Thus, in one part, *Applied Christianity* is chiefly occupied with *gratia elevans*, while in another place it is concerned with *gratia medicinalis*. But to speak of the one in given circumstances is by no means to deny the existence of the other: both go together.

Keeping in mind this distinction, it can readily be seen that the usage of *Applied Christianity* is entirely consistent. In speaking of *gratia elevans*, it compares grace to pure nature, to nature in its highest excellence; and it says that grace superelevates men above this nature to the divine. But all the time it remembers that this pure and unblemished nature is not the nature that actually exists among men, that nature in the concrete is fallen nature, and still bears some of the marks of the Fall. And then it speaks of *gratia medicinalis*: of how grace is given to us also to overcome that tendency to evil that is in us; of how we cannot, apart from grace and correspondence with it, live in the long run even a wholly blameless natural life, and cannot therefore achieve a perfect natural love of God.

§ 7. Heresy Hunt

The last of the Critic's objections is that which charges *Applied Christianity* with a directly heretical teaching, although, as noted, it is proposed as an "incidental" error. Such an "incidental" error is indeed serious enough, although it is so preposterous, as applied to the book that it scarcely merits attention. The Critic quotes one passage, in which, as he thinks, he has found the heresy. The passage is this:

"The supernatural virtues alone make me a Christian – faith, hope, and charity."⁸⁷

87. *Applied Christianity*, p. 18 [p. 21 our edition].

On the basis of one sentence this brother priest imputes heresy to me. He does not consider the context of the remark: he makes not the slightest effort to relate it to the rest of the teachings of the book. He explains in detail the “invisible Church theory” and attributes it to *Applied Christianity* – on the basis of that one sentence. This was really to be expected: so far he has practised some restraint: but the game that he is playing almost inevitably degenerates into a heresy-hunt. His predecessor tried to convict me of professing certain Jansenistic tenets. The present Critic, undiscouraged by the failure of his colleague, attempts to fasten on me the errors of Luther.

What is the basis of this charge? Well, the above statement is supposed to imply a denial of the visible Church; to be a Christian, *Applied Christianity* says, one must practice faith, hope, and charity: it is these that constitute Christian conduct. The Critic interprets this to mean that the Church is not a visible society but an invisible union of souls joined to God only by faith and charity. He therefore quotes the present Pontiff’s Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, in which it is said:

“Actually only those are to be included as members of the Church who have been baptized and profess the true faith, and who have not been so unfortunate as to separate themselves from the unity of the Body, or been excluded by legitimate authority for grave faults committed.”

I say the charge is preposterous; and I grieve that a brother priest would make it against me. *Applied Christianity* is not a dogmatic tract. At no point in it does it attempt to fix the requirements for membership in the Church of Christ. It takes all that dogmatic teaching for granted and addresses itself directly to Catholics – those who are already members of the Church – to exhort them to live up to the dignity which is theirs. In other words, here as elsewhere, its emphasis is moral; it seeks not at all to promote dogmatic teachings peculiar to any school of theology, but to take the elementary teachings of the Church and point out their practical implications. And of course since Catholics receive, in baptism, the virtues of faith, hope, and charity, it is their business to live in accordance with them: this will be their specifically Christian type of activity.

As for the visible Church – *Credo*. Is any other answer necessary? Nor are the practical counsels of *Applied Christianity* in the slightest degree incompatible with that profession of faith. And this is what, in answering the present objection, I wish to show.

Although the Church on earth is a visible Society, owing to the fact that it is composed of men, who have bodies as well as souls, it is never-

theless still true, that even for men on earth, the essential relationship of religion is the spiritual relationship between God and the soul: it is to inaugurate, increase and perfect that relationship, by drawing men into union with God, that the Church itself exists. “That they all may be one, as I Father in Thee and Thou in me: that they all may be one in us.” (John 1.7, 21) That is the final purpose of all God’s ordinances. The visible Church is the *means* established by God to realize that purpose. Even the most sacred elements in the visible Church, the Sacraments, have the character of a means. The Eucharist itself, which brings God to us is a means; so that in giving it to one who is about to depart from this world we call it *Viaticum – via-te-cum* – something to help along the *way*: but not yet the *End*; for even the Eucharistic presence of God is not yet that which we hope to enjoy when we shall see Him as He is.

Thus, although we must not neglect the means established by God, we are not to forget the End towards which this means is intended to lead us. Indeed, we ought to think about the End, as men think about their destination in a long and tiresome journey. For one thing the thought is inspiring and encouraging. For another thing, and this is more important still, the clear vision of one’s end gives definiteness and direction to one’s efforts. To use a means without intending an end is to be like one who would get on a train without intending to go anywhere.

One feels that this is a description of many Catholics: they use the means without intending to go anywhere. Faithful to the Sacraments and to the devotions of the Church, they scarcely realize that these were to lead them to an end: personal sanctity and union with God. And in many cases it can be said that they make scarcely any spiritual effort to get closer to God: they use the Sacraments but often do not wish to become “too religious”, that is, get “too close” to God. That is why, after years of receiving the Sacraments, there is no improvement in their lives, why one so often hears priests and religious, after making use of the Sacraments for many years, candidly admit that their fervor is less than it was in the beginning of their religious or priestly careers. Imagine: receiving the Sacraments, or offering Holy Mass, perhaps daily, and getting farther away from God! If there is a tendency among some to deny the visible Church and assert that religion, even on this earth, consists solely in an invisible union with God, this tendency is formally heretical and exists among those outside the Church. Among those within, there is an opposite tendency.

This opposite tendency within the Church – this preoccupation with the means rather than with the end, with the visible Church to the forgetfulness of the invisible Church – has been well called, by a recent Catholic

writer “ecclesiastical materialism”. This writer says:

“Ecclesiastical materialism is a disease to which institutional religion is naturally liable. Or we may regard it as a parasitic growth upon institutional religion. The greater the part played in any religion by the external institution, the more vigorously may this parasite be expected to flourish. There is no religion in which the institution plays a greater or more essential part than the Catholic. Therefore, ecclesiastical materialism flourishes more vigorously in Catholicism than in any other religion.”⁸⁸

Of course there arises the question as to how Catholics can be in any sense materialists. The author explains:

“Materialism is the doctrine that matter is the primary and the ultimate reality, mind but a secondary and incidental product of matter. Many, however, who are not theoretical materialists are practical materialists. For though they would affirm that the spiritual is primary, *in practice* they treat material goods as more valuable than spiritual. This being what materialism is in itself, it is easy to see how it works in the ecclesiastical sphere: ecclesiastical materialism regards the external aspect of religion, the visible institution, as primary: the spiritual aspect of religion, the relation between the soul and God as secondary. Among Catholics it results *in the body of the Church, the visible Church, being preferred to the soul of the Church*, the invisible Communion of saints. The title ecclesiastical materialism is thus particularly appropriate. Ecclesiastical materialism, however, is never a theoretical belief, a doctrine explicitly held. On the contrary, in theory it is universally rejected by all Catholics. It is a practical attitude not consciously realized by those who hold it. They would, indeed, repudiate it indignantly. It is none the less real, and none the less common.”⁸⁹

I suggest that the reader examine for himself the various manifestations of ecclesiastical materialism as they are ably described by the author we have been following. Here we are concerned with only one. The abuse does not consist alone in an over-emphasis on the Church’s temporalities – which however is not an uncommon form, especially among the clergy –, but in any preoccupation with the material elements of the visible

88. E. I. Watkin, *The Catholic Centre* (New York: Sheed and Ward), p. 139.

89. *Loc. cit.*, (Italics mine.)

Church to the neglect of the invisible and mystical element in religion.

Even in much preaching and in many books of devotion, there is a great preoccupation with the means, together with a relative neglect of the End. Many preachers and writers talk continually about the Sacraments, the Mass, the external rites and ceremonies of the Church – in a word about all the rich spiritual means put at our disposal for living a supernatural life, but very little about the End of that life – the perfection of holiness and union with God –, which these various means are designed to serve. This is so often the case, and so regularly taken for granted as the normal condition of things, that the former Critic reproached *Applied Christianity* for saying “so little about such essentially Catholic *means* [!] of sanctification as Holy Communion, assistance at Mass, and devotion to the Blessed Virgin.” In replying to this, I observed that there is a similar omission in many of the greatest spiritual classics. There is, in fact – it is scarcely too much to say – more about these *means* in *Applied Christianity* than there is in the combined works of St. Francis de Sales and St. John of the Cross. The explanation for this is that these spiritual masters were primarily concerned with the End, holiness and love of God. They did not of course intend to slight the means. There is of course no opposition between means and end: both go together: each needs and supposes the other; although the End is prior in importance, being that which fixes, determines, and directs the means. And the saints knew that nothing can have more persuasive power in bringing the faithful to the Sacraments, the liturgy, and all the splendid devotions of the Church – nothing can more forcefully bring home to them the value, importance, beauty, and necessity of these means, than a clear vision of the End and a pressing desire to reach it and possess it. Therefore, they devoted their efforts to describing that vision and arousing that desire. Is it not the enthusiastic account of a beautiful place that makes us desire to visit it? Had we never heard of it, would we be made restless by such a desire?

It is similarly the purpose of *Applied Christianity* to bring the attention of those who read it to a knowledge of the sublime End and destiny that is theirs. It has no thought of neglecting the means; but it also works on the assumption that the desire for the end, once it is stirred up in the heart, will do more to bring men to the sources of grace administered by the visible Church than the most eloquent rhetorical descriptions of them or the most learned scientific discussions.



Truth is usually held in a balance. With our finite minds especially, unable to grasp all of truth in the breadth of a thought, as God does, we are compelled to distinguish and divide, to assert, modify, and balance various aspects of the truth. To emphasize the invisible element of religion to the rejection or neglect of the visible Church would indeed be an error. It is also an error, however, to fall into the opposite extreme and, out of preoccupation with outward signs, to forget about the inward communication of grace and the purpose it is intended to effect.

Had my Critic wished to be fair – had he been concerned with the truth rather than with obtaining a condemnation, he would have seen this and kept both aspects of the truth in mind. He would not have emphasized one aspect of truth *exclusively*, in order to condemn *Applied Christianity* for emphasizing a different aspect. It is true that *Applied Christianity* emphasizes the invisible Church – without however denying or casting the slightest doubt on the Visible Church. The Critic emphasizes the Visible Church, and that only, almost to the exclusion of any interest in the invisible Church. At least he thinks that I over-emphasize what St. John of the Cross calls the “proximate means” of union with God, the theological virtues faith, hope, and charity – a thing which it is scarcely possible to do, since the theological virtues are to be practiced without measure.

He appeals to the authority of Pope Pius XII; but one may find, upon looking into the *Mystici Corporis*, that the Pope, while in truth saying what the Critic quotes him as saying, does not content himself with emphasizing one element of the truth. As I have before had to reproach this Critic, and the former one, for quoting some author in their favor by severing truth and accepting only one side, so I now find he uses the writings of the Supreme Pontiff in the same way.

Certainly the Pope teaches that the Church is visible and condemns those who depart from this teaching:

“Hence they err in a matter of divine truth, who imagine the Church to be invisible, intangible, a something merely ‘pneumatological’ as they say...” (§ 14)

But a little further on (§ 61) he emphasizes the opposite, balancing [one] side of the truth; showing how the Church is not merely a visible society and a moral body:

“In the moral body, the principle of union is nothing more than the common end, and the common cooperation of all

under authority for the attainment of that end; whereas in the Mystical Body, of which We are speaking, this collaboration is supplemented by a distinct internal principle, which exists effectively in the whole and in each of its parts, and whose excellence is such, that of itself it is vastly superior to whatever bonds of union may be found in a physical or moral body. This is something, as We have said above, not of the natural but *of the supernatural order*. Essentially it is something infinite, uncreated: the Spirit of God, Who, as the Angelic Doctor says, ‘numerically, one and the same, fills and unifies the whole Church’.”

Later he adds, describing the unity of these two elements:

“There can, then, be *no real opposition* between the invisible mission of the Holy Spirit, and the juridical commission of Ruler and Teacher received from Christ. Like body and soul in us, they complement and perfect each other...” (§ 64)

And if the Pontiff condemns those who deny the Church visible, he no less condemns those who deny the Church invisible:

“From what we have thus far written and explained Venerable Brothers, it is clear, We think how grievously they err who arbitrarily picture the Church as something hidden and invisible, *as do they also* who look upon it as a mere human institution with a certain disciplinary code and external ritual, but lacking power to communicate supernatural life.” (§ 63)

Finally, in bringing these two elements of the Church together and showing their respective importance, he also vindicates the importance attached by *Applied Christianity* to faith, hope, and charity:

“These juridical bonds [of the visible Church] far surpass those of any other human society, however exalted; and yet *another principle of union* must be added to them in those three virtues, which link us so closely to each other and to God: Christian faith, hope, and charity.” (§ 72)

I will not quote any further, but add merely that the Pope, having affirmed this much, goes on to devote a special section of his encyclical to each of these three theological virtues, thus showing in a practical way how much they are to be emphasized. Charity, he says, “more than any other virtue, *binds us to Christ*.”

This is the reason for the importance of the theological virtues: they

bind us to Christ, and, through Christ, to God. St. Thomas, in distinguishing the moral and theological virtues, says that while the former separate us from the things of the world, the latter unite us directly to God; and this is the reason for their preeminence. They are indeed proximate means of union with God.

Moreover, the theological virtues are forms of activity specifically characteristic of Christians. And this is precisely the point of *Applied Christianity*. Had the Critic bothered to look at the context of the statement that he attacks, he would have seen that its specific purpose was, not to stipulate the conditions required for membership in the Church, but to distinguish the activity that is distinctively Christian from the characteristically human and natural activity of pagans. The preceding sentence reads:

“If I seek to avoid sin and aim at nothing higher, ignoring the requirements of charity and the impulse of grace, than I live as a pagan rather than as a Christian – a good pagan, no doubt, such as described by Aristotle, but a pagan, nevertheless, having a natural and rational standard of conduct. Moreover I can practice all the natural virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance) and still remain a pagan. The supernatural virtues alone make me a Christian – faith, hope, and charity.”

Life is characterized by activity, and each level of life is characterized by a distinctive kind of activity. Plants grow and reproduce themselves; animals see and move – dogs bark, serpents crawl, birds fly. Man also has his own characteristic type of activity: he thinks and wills. In the moral order also his activity is, or should be distinctive: he conforms himself to reason: this is the moral conduct of the good pagan. But the Christian has been divinized by grace, and his peculiar activity must be correspondingly higher: it is in fact the activity of faith, hope, and charity.

And so it is proper for those who write on spiritual subjects to exhort souls to this specifically supernatural activity. Let me cite in this connection part of a passage that I have already quoted:

“The holy angels never performed those actions which we call purely natural; they renounced forever their self-love from the pure motive of the love of God: and whilst they were in a state of probation, they performed only acts of faith, hope, charity, and other supernatural virtues... We ought to imitate this fidelity of the angels, acting always on supernatural principles.”⁹⁰

Certainly this statement – a moral exhortation – involves no denial

of the Visible Church. Similarly, my statement in its context means something quite different from what my Critic would force it to mean. Nor does it ignore or slight the visible Church: the theological virtues *presuppose* the visible Church. For they are infused with grace, and grace comes through the Sacraments, and Sacraments are outward signs administered by the visible Church. If one practices faith, hope, and charity, one has only to look up in order to reassure himself that he is not far from the strong, solid walls of the Visible Church.

III

The Spirit and Method of the Attack

§ 1.

The Spirit of the Attack

It seems necessary to offer some explanation of how such a learned man as the Critic could fall into errors so numerous and so egregious that there is scarcely one word of truth or of soundness in all that he has written.

I have already mentioned the spirit in which these objections originate: pious naturalism. Now that we have concluded our task of meeting them individually, the reader will note, if he reviews them in his mind, that six out of the seven objections take their rise directly from a determination to defend nature against what are considered the encroachments of grace. The seventh objection, while it does not immediately defend nature, is a protest against what the Critic considers an exaggeration of the importance of the supernatural virtues. This talk of “death and annihilation, temporal, natural and spiritual, in all things that the will esteems, wherein consists all self-denial” (St. John of the Cross), offends these philosophers of the natural order, and at this demand of the Cross they cry out like Peter, before he had been enlightened by the Holy Spirit: “Lord, be it far from Thee, this shall not be unto Thee!” (Matt. 16, 22)

In the same manner does the natural man respond to the grim promise that, with Christ, he will be nailed to the Cross. “In this rebuke,”

90. *The Spiritual Doctrine of Father Louis Lallemant*, p. 100.

comments Father Edward Leen, “Peter makes himself the spokesman of average humanity.” But we know the crushing answer made by Jesus to this whining of “average humanity”: “Go behind me Satan; thou art a scandal unto me, because thou savourest *not the things that are of God*, but the things that are of man.” (*Ibid.*, 4, 23)

“These sharp words are addressed not only to Peter but to all future pleasure-seeking Christians who look for a Christianity without the Cross.”⁹¹ No doubt the humanity in all of us cringes before the necessity of being baptized with the baptism wherewith Jesus was baptized and of drinking the chalice that He drank of; but this does not justify our shrinking from the conditions demanded of them who would be followers of Him whose whole life was a cross and a martyrdom: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” (Luke, 9, 23)



The Critic mentions that his objections and those of the former Critic are by no means the first ones raised against such ideals of Evangelic living as are contained in *Applied Christianity*. Some of my colleagues, as the Critic mentions, were earlier attacked in Canada. If one takes the trouble to go back and analyze that first criticism, one will discover that many of its accusations were the same as in the two attacks on *Applied Christianity*. But, above all, the spirit was the same: a jealous regard for the rights of nature, and a tendency to attenuate the demands of grace or to speak of them only in a vague and impractical way. That first attack, as the Critic mentions, was answered by a Canadian priest, who also pointed out the worldly spirit in which the criticisms had their origin, in order to explain how such an assault could be made by priests and religious on the preaching of the Evangelic ideal. The present Critic characterizes this answer as “acrimonious”; but he has no such sharp adjective for the article of his Canadian predecessor, which, without a scrap of evidence nor a shred of authority, imputed heretical teachings to a large group of priests and religious. Nor does he mention that this first attack was answered also by a Canadian bishop, who described the preaching under attack as “the most supernatural and most efficacious priestly and Christian awakening ever registered in our religious history of Canada.”

91. Leen: *The True Vine and its Branches*, pp. 154-155.

§ 2.

The Second Lesson in Logic.

Let us consider also the method whereby the Critic arrived at these erroneous conclusions. I have already pointed out his confusion of thought, his consistent failure to distinguish and define terms. In any writing that claims to investigate and study truth, this is a capital omission; and in one who has been trained in the methods of scholasticism, so painstaking in setting down definitions of terms at the very beginning of its inquiries, such an omission is wholly inexcusable. And what I wish to show now is how this carelessness and confusion allow error to enter into the very structure of the Critic's thinking, falsifying it from the start.

The method used by scholasticism is that of logical argument, and the form that this argument follows is that of the syllogism. The syllogism, if rightly used, provides an air-tight method of rational procedure; and the knowledge of its laws enables one to check the development of an argument at every step. To a student just beginning to take up the study of logic, the rules that govern syllogistic reasoning may seem merely arbitrary. Actually, they express the inherent natural laws of the mind's functioning. One of these rules is that in every syllogism there can be three, and only three, terms: the Subject, Predicate, and Middle. This is the rule that is involved in the present controversy, the rule that the Critic consistently violates. And, since the matter is of importance here, I shall consider it in some detail.

Knowledge is increased by the discovery of relationships among realities. No doubt the realities already exist; so do the relationships objectively considered: but the human mind discovers them only gradually, and the accumulation of such discoveries is called knowledge. Now the syllogistic method is of value precisely because it helps to discover such relationships.

Let us consider two realities – “A” and “C” (they correspond to the Subject and Predicate mentioned above). We wish to know whether there is any relationship between them, especially if there is any constant, essential, or causal relationship between them. How can we proceed? Our knowledge of them in reference to each other is definitely limited; but we know enough about them to suspect a relation. If we can find some third reality, different from each yet containing some property or properties common to both, we shall have a basis for comparison. This third reality – “B” – stands midway between “A” and “C”. Hence it is called the

“Middle Term” of the syllogism. If we know the relationship of “A” to “B” and of “C” to “B”, we will be able – on the principle that two things equal to the same thing are equal to each other – to find the relationship of “A” to “C” and thus widen the horizon of our knowledge.

Here is an example to illustrate the case. Suppose that you are Bill Green of Hominy, Pa. At one of Hominy’s gala festivities, you meet another man with exactly the same name – Bill Green. You are interested, of course; especially as you also discover, besides the similarity of names, some slight physical resemblance – you both have, let us say, the well-known Green double-chin. Your problem is now the same as that of the scientist: a relationship is indicated on the surface of things and you wish to see if one really exists: you are looking for a “Middle Term.” If, in searching about, you find a third person who is related to both you and the other Bill Green, you will be enabled to establish a definite relationship between yourselves. If, however, you can find no “Middle Term,” or you discover definitely that there is none, then you will have to conclude, however regretfully, that you and the other Bill are not related; and you will accordingly not be able to claim him – and his talents or his money – for your clan.

Let us suppose your inquiries are at first fruitless. Your own people have been socially prominent in Hominy for generations, but the other Bill’s people immigrated recently from a different state. On further inquiry, however, you learn that the other Bill’s people were in fact originally from Hominy, and that Bill is a great-great grandnephew of Old Andy Green, who was your great-great grandfather. You are delighted; you welcome Bill back into the clan with something of the affection of the father in the Gospel for his prodigal son; and, as an expression of this newly-found bond of unity, you may even move into a double house with the other Bill’s people. Science has been advanced, a “Middle Term” discovered, a new relationship established.

Now let us carry the example one step further. Rejoicing in your genealogy, you continue your researches, and at length discover, to your immense sorrow, and in spite of appearances to the contrary, that you and the other Bill are not related at all. In the early days of Hominy (so your studies reveal) there had been two Old Andy Greens, who were not related, one having been originally from Upper Silesia while the other was from Liechtenstein, both having later Anglicized their names. The other Bill is the great-great-grandnephew of the one, you are the great-great grandson of the other. Sadly you move out of the double house and cast about for another explanation of your double chins. Your “Middle Term” (Old Andy) was only apparently a Middle Term: it was not a true

Middle: under a surface resemblance it cloaked an essential dissimilarity.
Science is balked.



Now let us go back to the rule of the syllogism. Casting about for a Middle Term to use as basis of comparison between “A” and “C”, you at length find one; and we will suppose you come out of your ratiocinations with a discovery like the following:

All men can think,
Homer can think,
Therefore, Homer is a man.

The discovery is not sensational, but in any case the logic is sound. “Homer” and “man” are Subject and Predicate – “A” and “C”, respectively. The Middle Term, the ground of comparison, is “can think.” It is a true Middle, because in both the Major Premise (“All men can think”) and the “Minor Premise” (“Homer can think”) it has *exactly the same meaning*; in other words, it is the same Middle Term in both the Major and the Minor Premise: although it is used twice, there is only one Middle Term, so that the logical rule requiring three and only three terms is observed.

But the fact that the Middle Term, although necessarily one, is used twice in the syllogistic form, allows ample opportunity for logical legerdemain; or at least for miscarriage. Thus:

All men have life.
Fido has life.
Therefore, Fido is a man.

The logical form seems blameless, yet we know that something is wrong; for Fido – we cannot escape the conclusion as we look at him – is a dog. What has happened to our logic? For surely there is something the matter with reasoning that so patently contradicts facts. Well, there are four terms in that syllogism: “Fido” is the Subject, “man” is the Predicate, but there are two Middles. Where? is not “life” the Middle Term in both the Major and the Minor Premise? Yes, but it has *different meanings* in each of these Premises. Vastly different meanings. In the Major Premise the meaning is “rational life,” while in the Minor, the meaning is “animal or sensible life.” The difference is essential. The syllogism really has two Middle Terms (and therefore four terms altogether), although this is cloaked by the fact that both are expressed by *one word*. A superficial resemblance disguises their essential dissimilarity. We are now in the position of Bill Green when he discovers that under the one name of “Old

Andy Green” there were really two men; so that he and the other Bill Green cannot be related.



In such rough examples as this the point is obvious enough. When deeper and more refined issues are involved, the logical error is not so easily detected, but it is none the less gross. And it is precisely this error that the Critic has been making right along, owing to his confusion of the moral and physical (or ontological) orders. Using one term with two distinct meanings, he constructs a series of syllogisms, each with two Middle Terms and therefore with four Terms altogether, in defiance of all logical reasoning. Here is the essence of his argument:

“*Applied Christianity* condemns natural activity [i.e., in the *moral* sense: natural affections and motives].

But natural activity [i.e., in the *ontological* sense] is good, even necessary, and at times obligatory.

Therefore, *Applied Christianity* condemns what is good, necessary, and obligatory.”

And, of course, a further conclusion follows, namely, that *Applied Christianity* is unsound and unsafe, since Christianity can never condemn what is necessary and obligatory.

Obviously, with such a handy little device as the syllogism with four terms one can, within reason, prove almost anything. All that you have to do is to find an ambiguous Middle. For this reason the Critic’s use of ambiguous words and his regular confusion of distinct concepts is, as should now be apparent, of great practical importance. Fired by zeal for the cause of nature, the Critic set out to prove that *Applied Christianity*, which teaches people *not* to live according to nature, is therefore unsound. In the above syllogism, *Applied Christianity* is the Subject, while “condemns what is good,” etc., is the Predicate. Between these two terms the Critic was trying to establish a relationship. “Natural activity” – undefined – and confused with natural affections, desires, and motives, offers itself. The Critic is undeterred by the fact that *Applied Christianity* uses the term “natural activity” exclusively in the ontological sense, while it uses the terms natural affections, desires, and motives exclusively in the moral sense. In no place does the book condemn “natural activity”, having as we have seen expressly excluded it from the condemnation spoken against natural affections.⁹²

I do not mean to suggest that, in following this method of argumentation, the Critic is being deliberately dishonest. His faulty reasoning is

the result from intellectual confusion and carelessness, as well as from his want of acquaintance with the language of spiritual doctrine. But he has certainly had ample time to correct his error. The bishop of whom I spoke above, in answering charges made against some of my colleagues, was forced to say, already in August, 1941, that the misunderstandings of our adversaries arose from a confusion of the moral and metaphysical orders. He said, for example:

“What [the Critic] has not done has been done ten times, a hundred times... The speakers and the listeners in question have distinguished and explained *nature* and *natural goods* in the metaphysical order, physically and morally. It is a dishonesty to treat with silence what is obvious. The whole article is faulty and reads erroneously because, without being aware, [the Critic] conveys metaphysically that which is of the moral order.”

The procedure of the present Critic – the reader may now see for himself – is the same, and as questionable, as that of his Canadian predecessor.

The doctrines of *Applied Christianity* are in no danger from such criticism as this.

IV

The Misconcept of Sacred Theology

§ 1.

“Ever learning, never attaining to the knowledge of the truth.” (2 Tim., 3, 17)

There is a deeper reason than bad logic for the Critic’s false *position* in this controversy. It is a state of mind of which I have spoken several times in the course of this essay: a false attitude towards theology itself, a

92. Another form in which this false syllogism has appeared in the objections we have been considering is the following. “*Applied Christianity* condemns all natural considerations [i.e., all natural motives]. But natural considerations [i.e., mental activity – prudence and foresight] are necessities in human life. Therefore, *Applied Christianity* condemns activities necessary to human life: and its teachings must therefore be erroneous.”

misconcept of theology. It is not an uncommon attitude and is worth describing.

First of all, it tends to view theology in an abstract way as a series of doctrinal formulae, or as a system of speculative knowledge without much relation to life. What I mean is illustrated by the fact that seminarians often spend four years studying this theology, constantly having before their minds the great truths of our redemption, without any real transformation taking place in their lives; at the end of their studies they have only a system of rules, not a dynamic principle that renews their lives. It is illustrated also by the fact that the instructions given in parishes – although dealing with such sublime mysteries as the Trinity and the Incarnation and our elevation by grace to share in the divine life – rarely make much change in the lives of those instructed. When the lessons are over, the converts make a profession of their new faith; but they live for the most part exactly as before.

No doubt the Critic will reject such a judgment. Those whose theology is that of the head are inclined to despise the theology of the heart. The latter is regarded as sentimental, flaccid and pietistic, whereas true piety, it is said, is based on knowledge, and knowledge is in the intellect. Thus intellectual snobbishness becomes cloaked as “piety”, the true and rational piety: and, after all, does not the theological virtue of faith reside in the intellect?

Now certainly no fault can be found with a piety based on knowledge. The quarrel is with knowledge that does not bear fruit in piety. And if faith dwells in the intellect, does not charity belong to the will? And is not charity nothing other than the most sublime kind of love?

The Critic will perhaps say (he does say it in his book, *The Concept of Sacred Theology*) that, according to St. Thomas, theology, while being at once speculative and practical, is rather speculative than practical. No doubt. But that is only the same as saying that God is more important than man: so that as a consequence the knowledge of God, considered absolutely, is much more important than the knowledge of man. Nevertheless, if we consider matters not from God’s point of view independently of ours but from that which is properly our own, as also in relation to God’s eternal redemptive plan, then practical theology, the theology that transforms conduct and inflames the will, is vastly important, being the means whereby we are purified and prepared to enter the presence of Him Who dwells in inaccessible light. Nowhere is there a text in St. Thomas to show that this practical theology is unimportant.

We can distinguish dogmatic or speculative theology from moral or practical theology as follows.⁹³ The former treats of God as He is in Himself, and also as He is the principle and end of all creatures. It treats of the nature of God and also of the divine activities: concerning the latter it may be said to study the *structure* of the divine plan in regard to men. Moral or practical theology, on the other hand, shows us how we are to attain to God and have Him both as the source and end of all our actions. For, although viewing the structure of the divine plan, we may say that God is man's true end, still man is free, is under no coercion, may choose an end other than God. And even if he is of good will – if he chooses God and earnestly seeks after Him – still he must know *how* this is to be done: he must study the means at hand and be trained in their use, he must be shown the difficulties in his way and how they may be surmounted, he must be made to see the conditions that are to be fulfilled before God will be, in truth and perfectly, his first beginning and last end.

Thus if dogmatic theology is the basis, moral theology is a super-structure. And if there is a sense in which we may say that the foundation is the most important part of the building, as being that on which all else is built, so there is a sense also in which the roof is the most important part, for it gives the shelter for which the building is constructed in the first place. So also, if dogmatic theology provides us with a foundation for our practice, then moral theology, which immediately guides practice, teaches us how to grow in virtue, especially in love, which is the end and culmination of the Christian life. Dogmatic theology reveals the design of God and describes the promise and privilege that is ours; its teaching is an earnest of the Truth that we all hope to see one day face to face. But moral theology assists us in carrying out our part in the design, in realizing the promise, in leading us to that very Truth, before which, as St. Thomas saw so clearly in his last moments, all our knowledge here is but as rubbish⁹⁴.

For this reason St. Thomas teaches that in the supernatural world, the world of faith, to love is better than to know.⁹⁵ (in the human plane – if one speaks on the level of natural philosophy – the reverse is true: knowledge is better than love. For by knowing a thing, even an inorganic

93. See Merkelbach, *op. cit.*, I, 1 and 2.

94. Unable to continue and complete the *Summa*, the Saint said to his companion: "I can do no more; such things have been revealed to me that everything I have written seems to me rubbish."

95. II II, 23, 6, c.

thing, we in a certain sense elevate it to our own level, clothing it with the spirituality of our minds; but when we love a thing we are drawn out of ourselves to it and we partake of its condition. Thus a man who loves riches is degraded, whereas a man who, without loving riches, knows the laws that govern economics is not. When we love those on our own plane, we remain on our own level: we are not elevated. Now in relation to God, the reverse is true: in knowing Him, we are compelled to draw Him into the limitations of our minds, and, in doing this, we diminish His glory; whereas in loving Him we are drawn out of ourselves to Him, and we in some sense share His condition: we are, as it were, divinized. Since “God is-love”, we, in loving, come to resemble God. Obviously – not to speak absolutely, but from the point of view of our own cloddishness, – the theology of the heart is tremendously important to us: without it we cannot become “new creatures”.

Accordingly, Jacques Maritain has well written:

“In us as well as in God, love must proceed from the Word, that is from the spiritual possession of the truth, in Faith.

“And just as everything which is in the Word is found once more in the Holy Spirit, so must all that we know pass into our power of affection by love, there only finding its resting place. Love must proceed from Truth, and Knowledge must bear fruit in love.

“Our prayer is not what it ought to be, if either of those conditions is wanting.”⁹⁶

Let it be added: our theology likewise is not what it ought to be if either of these conditions is wanting. The Critic will perhaps say that the first condition – love proceeding from knowledge – is not verified in my case; I leave it to the reader to judge whether the doctrine set forth in *Applied Christianity* and defended in these two *Replies* is without solid doctrinal foundation. Certainly in his theology, the second condition – knowledge bearing fruit in love – is wanting; as is shown by his attempt to destroy the only kind of fruit that the wisdom of the Cross can bear: contempt for this world, detachment from creatures, entire love of God. We must put away vain reasonings. We can do no better than imitate the Trinity. As the Spirit of Love proceeds from the Word of Truth, *Filioque*, so must it be in us.

96. *Prayer and Intelligence* (New York: P. J. Kennedy and Sons, 1928), p. 3.

The separation of dogmatic and moral theology is a modern development. In the *Summa* of St. Thomas both are found together, conceived of as parts of one all-inclusive theological science. Not only are the principles of what we now call moral theology found in the *Summa*, but the basic principles and truths of both ascetical and mystical theology are found there as well. St. Thomas did not separate practice from truth; on the contrary he made truth the basis of the most exalted practice. Nowadays when a theologian writes a *Summa*, it is likely to be (except in the case of those who follow the plan of St. Thomas, commenting on his work) either a *Summa Theologiæ Moralis* or a *Summa Theologiæ Dogmaticæ*. Should it happen that one theologian writes two *Summa*'s, one of moral and one of dogmatic theology, he still observes the separation of these branches. And if one looks into the modern *Summa*'s of Moral Theology, one finds that there has usually been removed from them most of what pertains to ascetical and mystical theology, that is, the principles that regulate application of Christian truth to practice and to growth in holiness.

The Critic well calls the plan of St. Thomas's *Summa* the "master division" of theology. This being so, one wonders why all theologians do not adhere to it. There is need for someone to do for St. Thomas in theology what Cardinal Mercier did for him in philosophy, that is to restore him to the place of preeminence that is properly his and which the Church, as has been shown in many decrees, desires to have recognized. We should not merely give lip-service to his greatness, but also *study* him. Despite the urging of the Holy See to return to him, few priests today, after four years of theology, have little or no direct acquaintance with the works of St. Thomas. And technical theologians, while they use his works as a quarry for arguments, too frequently depart from the architectonic design – the master plan – that he has established for theological learning. We are familiar with the efforts of certain secular educators to direct their students back to the study of great works of our race, thereby releasing them from thralldom to inferior textbooks. It seems unfortunate that in Catholic schools generally, and in the seminaries where priests are trained, students also study only from textbooks and are for the most part left without any direct acquaintance with the Fathers and Doctors, even with him who is honored as the Common Doctor of the Church.

The effect of this separation of moral and dogmatic theology is twofold: it has an effect on dogma; it has an effect on moral also. In the next section I shall speak of the latter effect. Here let us consider the effect on dogma.

Certainly it is responsible – or, more exactly, its exaggeration is responsible – for the attitude of which we are speaking – the too exclusively speculative attitude that is so often taken towards the great truths of our faith. By segregating dogmatic truth from moral teaching, the practical implications and corollaries of the former tend to be lost sight of and neglected. It is forgotten that such sublime mysteries as the Trinity and the Incarnation have immediate practical implications. They are studied speculatively with the purpose of extending the horizons of faith. Their relation to charity is forgotten or passed over. Moral theology, on its part, sets about its inquiries independently of these great dogmatic truths: these being left to a separate sphere, lose their normative, practical, directing importance; and moral theology, as we shall see, seeks its norms elsewhere.

One could not make such statements without giving instances. And one instance at least will be noticed here. It is directly pertinent to the matter in hand, and its consideration will undoubtedly throw much light on the present controversy.



This controversy is in the subject-matter of grace and merit: the issues under discussion are the conditions required for corresponding with grace and for performing meritorious supernatural actions. All the differences between my Critics and myself are, in the last analysis, concerned with these conditions. The Critics are saying that *Applied Christianity* asks too much. I am saying that they are asking too little and that the norms of conduct they propose are little better than those of naturalism or humanism.

Now if the reader, in order to resolve the difficulty, would look into the works of a modern theologian to study the tract on grace, he would find it in a *Summa Theologiæ Dogmaticæ*. And supposing that, having read what this theologian has to say of the conditions required for corresponding with grace and for performing meritorious actions, he would go on to study what St. Thomas has to say on the matter. In doing this, he would make an important and interesting discovery. The tracts on grace and merit written by St. Thomas are to be found, not in the parts where he considers speculative dogmatic truths, but in the section in which he treats of moral theology. To St. Thomas, the problem of grace and merit are practical moral problems; to the modern theologian they are speculative dogmatic problems.

It is not that modern theologians, or all of them, depart from the

teachings of St. Thomas in this matter. Many wish to follow him. But of course while St. Thomas laid down principles of general validity, he could not address himself to all the problems of theology, some of which have developed only in the centuries since his death. And in the present problem concerning the conditions required for corresponding with grace, his views are not perfectly clear. Different schools of thought claim his authority; so that we are left without his certain guidance on the matter. But the fact that the problem is discussed by St. Thomas as a moral problem, while modern theologians apportion it to dogma is significant as showing the temper and attitude of modern theologians. St. Thomas treats of grace as a moral problem because, according to him, grace is an intrinsic principle of action and conduct; that is to say, it is the inner dynamism that impels supernatural conduct. Why modern theologians treat this as a speculative problem, and what this leads to, we shall immediately examine.

Actually there are two problems; one speculative, the other practical. They are not separate, that is, wholly without relation to one another, but they are distinct. They belong to two closely related but distinct spheres of human activity: the one is a problem of thought; the other is a problem of action; while of course the principles involved in the problem of thought have a practical bearing, just as the principles of action have a speculative basis. So an architect, to practice an art, must know the theory of balancing masses; but he must also have experience of material and construction.

The speculative problem is to determine what is absolutely the minimum requirement or condition for a human action in order that it may be supernaturally meritorious. The dogmatic theologian wants to know what conditions that are essential and necessary. He asks what is *required*, what is *sufficient*. This concern for the minimum does not necessarily mean that he is a laxist, seeking to evade the higher implications of God's law. It simply means that, as a scientist, he wishes to isolate and identify the absolutely essential conditions required for supernatural merit.

Obviously, if he succeeds in finding the minimum essential requirement, it does not follow that Catholics are forbidden to go beyond what is minimum and essential. It does not follow that the theologian himself wishes to forbid this, or that he even wishes to discourage it. He is dealing with principles, as a scientist; it does not concern him, as a speculative theologian – though it of course concerns him as a Christian and as a priest – what use is made of these principles. Of course it may happen – and alas, it does happen – that some men, having discovered the

minimums are unwilling to engage in the moral or spiritual effort necessary to carry them further; they are content, and even determined, to spend their lives at the beginning, never to put away the things of children.

Here is where the practical problem comes in the use to which one *ought* to put the divine gifts. This is the province of ascetical and mystical theology. These branches are above all concerned with practice. They do not attempt to solve the problems of speculative theology or to pronounce upon them. They take the principles that speculative theology offers, and relate them to practice. But they are not only interested in the minimum and absolutely essential requirement, but also in the maximum possibility, the highest goal of Christian living, the manner in which we can most fully realize the potentialities of the gifts that God has given us. They are interested in the fullest Christian life, not only in the minimum requirements for any Christian life; they are interested in the best, not in the least; in perfection, holiness, complete purity of soul, generous service of God. They are also much concerned with concrete conditions: they may therefore point out that what is *sufficient*, is not always *safe*; that the temptations of the devil and the passions of fallen nature make it *desirable*, possibly *advisable*, perhaps even *morally necessary*, to go beyond the minimum. In any event, they exhort souls, as a matter of love and Christian virtue, aside from the need to avoid presumption, that it is better to seek after the highest than after the lowest.

Now *Applied Christianity* is concerned *only* with the practical problem; whereas these Critics, knowing only the speculative problem, interpret the teaching of *Applied Christianity* in terms of the latter and try to fasten on the book the least tenable of the views maintained in the controversy over it.

Suppose that there has been an accident, and two doctors are examining the body of an injured person. One doctor says he is dead; the other says he is not dead but shows faint signs of life. Theologians of the respective schools of thought dealing with the speculative problem are like these doctors. One school says that certain conditions are *required*, (i.e. a virtual supernatural intention) for merit, otherwise a man's works are supernaturally dead. Others maintain that even without such an intention, and with a mere natural intention, providing only one has grace and infused charity, one's works are alive, i.e., supernaturally meritorious. And so the argument goes on. Who is right? The matter has never been settled. Certainly *Applied Christianity* has not attempted to settle it. It is content let Rome's work to Rome.

But (to go back to the example), although the doctors are in disagreement as to whether the injured man is dead or alive, they are, I daresay, in agreement on this at least, that the poor fellow is not in the happiest or healthiest condition possible. Even though alive, and should they at length agree that he is alive, it is certain they would not feel that their professional duty has been accomplished or their medical skill fully exercised until the injured man has been restored to a condition of strength and vigor. So in the theological question. Although it is agreed that the works of him who has satisfied the *minimum requirements* are alive, it does not follow that they have all the vitality possible or desirable; and certainly a priest or theologian, whose love for the health of souls ought not to be any less than a doctor's solicitude about the body, should not be satisfied if the works and souls of their people have just enough of charity, but no more, to keep their spiritual pulse beating slowly and uncertainly.

I have no wish to ridicule the speculative controversy nor to minimize the value of its conclusions: in the example, it is a matter of great practical concern to the injured man how the doctors decide their argument: in the one case they will give him medical attention; in the other, they will send for an undertaker. But even if they find the man alive, they will not leave him thus: poor doctors indeed who could do no more than that.

So the practical director of souls, taking up where speculative theology leaves off, tries to give to souls all the beauty, strength, and vigor that properly belongs to sons of God. And among the means of accomplishing this none is more useful, although not absolutely necessary, than a frequent actualization and purification of the motive. Hence the insistence on this point in *Applied Christianity*. It does not teach that an actual supernatural intention is *required* in order to make an action meritorious at all: this would be to enter the speculative controversy. But it holds that the safest, best, most fruitful, and most meritorious practice is for souls to form a supernatural intention frequently and in this way purify and intensify their love. In attacking this doctrine, the Critic is attacking, not only *Applied Christianity*, but the whole tradition of Catholic ascetical teaching. There is *no controversy* in the practical problem; all authors are agreed; not a single theological authority could be quoted to support the contrary opinion, i.e., that natural motives are in any case better than supernatural motives, or that the purification and frequent repetition of the latter is not the most fruitful practice in living a Christian life.

It is not intended to suggest here that all who observe the distinction between dogmatic and moral theology fall into the error of which we are speaking. I am simply pointing out a tendency occasioned by this division, or by its exaggeration, in order to explain how men of learning, such as these Critics, can show such complete incomprehension concerning the actual conditions encountered in attempting to live a Christian life and of the dispositions and procedures best adapted for living such a life fruitfully. There are, let us be thankful, theologians having sufficient breadth and love of holiness to grasp at once both the speculative and the practical problems; so that, while maintaining a view concerning what is required as the minimum condition for gaining any merit at all (the speculative controversy), they go on, in their practical exhortations, to urge the adoption of the best, the most fruitful, and, in a word, the maximum practice. St. Alphonsus may serve as an example. He holds that, although any natural action may be elevated to the supernatural plane to become meritorious, there is also *required*, as a *minimum condition* (besides infused grace and charity) at least a virtual supernatural intention. This much, he holds, is *necessary*, and is also *sufficient* for gaining *some* merit. But when he leaves the speculative discussion to undertake the practical direction of souls, he urges them, not to be content with the opinion which he has defended as the minimum, but to adopt a much more perfect practice; for to adopt the minimum practice is to lose a great deal of grace, even though some may be gained; he says:

“Endeavor to renew your intention at the beginning of every action, at least in the beginning of the principal actions, such as your meditations. Communion, hearing Mass, work, meals, and recreation; saying always, at least mentally: ‘Lord, in this action I intend not my own pleasure, but only the accomplishment of Thy will.’ A holy hermit, as St. Jure relates, was accustomed to raise his eyes to heaven and to remain in that position for a little time before he began any action. Being asked why he did so, he said: ‘I am endeavoring to direct my aim.’ He meant to say that as the archer looks toward the mark in order to direct the arrow, so it is necessary to raise our eyes to God, that all our actions may be holy.”⁹⁷

97. *Op. cit.*, p. 606.

The Impoverishment of Moral Theology

The Critic will point to the fact that he subscribes to certain principles of moral theology, and that these at any rate are practical. But the practical moral theology to which he refers is very largely casuistry, that is to say, a study of concrete cases in what may be called theological pathology. This casuistry deals with cases where sin is involved, whether doubtfully or really, and it is the problem of the student of theology to ascertain whether or not the persons considered in the imaginary cases are guilty of sin. It is good, and necessary training for future *confessors* in their capacity as *judges*. It is quite different, however, from positive spiritual theology, and it will be of little value to confessors in their role of spiritual doctors and directors, while to priests in the pulpit, preaching the Word, it will be a definite disadvantage unless supplemented by another sort of theology – positive theology, spiritual doctrine, the theology of the heart.

A striking instance of this difference between mere casuistry and positive moral teaching, as well as of the importance and special need of the latter, is afforded in the life of Cardinal Newman. Certain charges were made against Newman by a popular Protestant writer of the day; his sincerity and honesty were attacked; he was represented as being secretly in communion with Rome even before his conversion, and therefore as posing hypocritically as an Anglican in order to bring converts to Rome: he was, in effect, as he himself describes the charge, called a liar. The support brought forward to support this outrageous accusation was the teaching of certain Catholic moralists, among them St. Alphonsus, permitting equivocation and mental reservation in certain cases. Men believing in such theories, the Accuser said, could never be trusted; it would never be possible to place reliance on their word: there would always be reason to fear some equivocation; it would never be possible to know the true position of their minds, while they themselves would justify such crookedness in order to promote their religious ends.

Obviously, this was an attack, not only on Newman, but on the whole Catholic priesthood. Newman replied in his now famous *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. After detailing the events leading up to his conversion, in vindication of his sincerity, he took up the particular charges of his Accuser. In meeting the charge of insincerity, supported as it was by his presumed acceptance of the theory of equivocation as explained and justified by St. Alphonsus, he pointed out the difference between casuistry and positive moral theology, between theology for the confessional and theology for the pulpit.

First of all, he showed that certain protestant divines had gone much further than St. Alphonsus, to the extent even of permitting direct lies in exceptional cases. But he went on to observe that such theories are no index either to the character or to the moral conscience of these men. Why not? For one thing, they are speaking of special and extreme cases. For another, they are forming a theory of morals and wish to complete it in detail, considering every possible case. Again, in performing this task, they are guided by logic rather than by personal conscience, which may direct them quite differently in their own private lives.

Newman then speaks of the high personal sanctity attained by St. Alphonsus, which is utterly incompatible with any meanness or crookedness of character. And he cites from the life of the Saint, whom the Accuser had attacked as lax, the circumstances of his conversion, which show him to have been of an exact and really scrupulous conscience. In regard to Catholic moral theology, Newman speaks especially of the need of casuistry in the confessional; and he says:

“But, in truth, a Catholic theologian has objects in view which men in general little compass; he is not thinking of himself, but of a multitude of souls, sick souls, sinful souls, carried away by sin, full of evil, and he is trying with all his might to rescue them from their miserable state; and, in order to save them from more heinous sins, he tries, to the full extent that his conscience will allow him to go, to shut his eyes to such sins, as are, though sins, yet lighter in character or degree. He knows perfectly well that, if he is as strict as he would wish to be, he shall be able to do nothing at all with the run of men; so he is as indulgent with them as ever he can be. Let it not be an instant supposed, that I allow of the maxim of doing evil that good may come; but, keeping clear of this, there is a way of winning men from greater sins by winking for the time at the less, or at mere improprieties or faults; and this is the key to the difficulty which Catholic books of moral theology so often cause to the Protestant. They are intended for the Confessor, and Protestants view them as intended for the Preacher.”⁹⁸

Newman then concludes his answer by quoting at length from the positive Catholic moral teaching on the matter of truthfulness; and this he takes, not from a manual of moral theology, but from the catechism of the Council of Trent. The reader may consult the passage in question to

98. *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (New York: Longmans), p. 278.

see how great is the difference between casuistry and positive moral doctrine. And Newman says:

“And now, if Protestants wish to know what our real teaching is, as on other subjects, so on that of lying, let them look, not at our books of casuistry, but at our catechisms. Works on pathology do not give the best insight into the form and the harmony of the human frame; and as it is with the body, so is it with the mind.”⁹⁹

Unfortunately, not only Protestants, but some theologians – of whose number, we shall see, the Critic is one – regard casuistry, which Newman here compares to pathology, as sufficient, not only for the Confessor, but also for the Preacher and Director of souls. At any rate they provide nothing better. And they even object, going to the length of crying “Heretic!” if anyone else attempts, in however modest a way, to supply the need. They are positively determined, as the attitude of these Critics make clear, that no one shall go beyond the minimum standards set forth by casuistry. Thus do they preach Jesus Christ, Who said, “Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5, 48).



That the present Critic is indeed guilty of an inadequate and misleading idea of moral theology, identifying this branch with mere casuistry and removing positive moral teaching from it, is clear from his own words. Thus he says, in his book, *The Concept of Sacred Theology*:

“Moral theology deals with the liceity and the illicit character of human acts. Because of its very nature the use of examples or cases constitutes an excellent pedagogical means for learning and explaining this discipline. For this reason the subject itself is sometimes known as *casuistic* moral. The term must never be used in a pejorative sense, since that teaching which is set forth in the traditional moral text-books has often been approved by the Church herself. There is always unfortunately a tendency among those who have never taken the trouble to master the field of moral theology to find fault with it because it ‘does not offer a high enough ideal’. As a matter of fact the moralist fulfills one of the most important functions in the explanation of Cath-

99. *Ibid.*, p. 279.

olic teaching. Were he to confuse the counsels and the commandments he would be guilty of making a fatal misstatement of that teaching which God revealed to man through Jesus Christ. It is his immediate business to point out what God has taught us as demanded by that life of grace which he has conceded to us in this world. In order to teach this properly, he must point out those acts which are not in accord with the life of grace, and those which are so opposed to that life as to be incompatible with it.”¹⁰⁰

The Critic thus limits the function of moral theology to a discussion of what is or is not sinful. It is to reduce moral theology to scarcely more than a system of natural ethics. In practice, too, this concern for sin is usually for *mortal* sin; venial sin is regarded as negligible; imperfections are scarcely recognized at all: thus we have seen, in dealing with the good pagan, that the Critic is unable to imagine him except as perfectly good or as in the state of mortal sin. Notice, too, how completely negative is the Critic's concept of moral theology: its function, he says, is to show what is opposed to the life of grace or what is not in accord with it: moral theology, in this conception, is not concerned with the increase, development, and perfection of supernatural life. For the moral theologian to speak of the higher ideals of the Gospel would be, it appears, to “confuse the counsels and the commandments”. Undoubtedly, it would be a grievous mistake for a theologian to confuse counsels with commandments. But is there any reason why he should not teach the counsels, especially their spirit, as well as the commandments, being mindful of their distinction? Above all, why should he not talk more of the greatest of the commandments – that of love – and of the terms, asking totality, in which it is given? Is there any reason why he should stop short with such charity as may be manifest in obedience to the natural law? Why he should not ask for total love as Jesus did in *His* moral theology? Certainly the priest is a confessor, and a confessor is a judge who should also know the minimum requirements of the law, so as not to bind unnecessary burdens on the consciences of sinners. The trouble is that when no other sort of moral theology is taught, which is rather frequently, the priest is given no means of directing and guiding souls to perfection, nothing to show sinners or worldlings or the sensually inclined how to shake themselves free from the law of the flesh, and no training that will enable him to teach positively from the pulpit, the sublime ideal of Christian living. As a consequence, he will preach casuistry from the pulpit also;

100. *The Concept of Sacred Theology*, p. 214.

that is he will give – and not only give, but insist upon – the absolute minimum standard of moral conduct, regarding anything else as a confusion of the counsels with the precepts or as evidence of religious fanaticism.

Of course all moral theologians do not make this mistake. But a good many do. And that is why there have been so many attacks made by theologians on the teachings of *Applied Christianity*, which is definitely not satisfied with teaching the minimum. In the *Introduction* to his work, *The Concept of Sacred Theology*, the Critic mentions that it was written originally as a dissertation, while he was studying at the *Angelicum*, under the direction of Father Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange. Such credentials are impressive; still they can scarcely make the great Dominican theologian responsible for such views as that quoted above from the Critic's work, especially as Father Garrigou-Lagrange himself writes:

“Modern theologians have often exaggerated the distinction between moral and dogmatic theology, giving to the latter the great treatises on grace and on the infused virtues and gifts, and reducing the former to casuistry, which is the least lofty of its applications. Moral Theology has thus become, in several theological works, the science of sins to be avoided rather than the science of virtues to be practiced and to be developed under the constant action of God in us. In this way it has lost some of its pre-eminence and is manifestly insufficient for the direction of souls aspiring to intimate union with God.”¹⁰¹

Here you see the master, heedless of the disciple's warnings, speaking of casuistry in a “pejorative sense”: would the disciple also say that his master, obviously guilty of what the Critic describes as an unfortunate tendency to “find fault with theology because it ‘does not offer a high enough ideal’”, has fallen into this mistake because he has “never taken the trouble to master the field of moral theology”?



The Critic of course speaks also of spiritual theology in his book: but it is rather to fill out a scheme than to accord spiritual doctrine – ascetical and mystical theology – a really integral place in his concept of sacred theology. If moral theology is concerned only with sin, and with sins against The Decalogue, as distinguished from the greatest

101. *Christian Perfection and Contemplation* (St. Louis: Herder), p. 13.

commandment of charity, then ascetical and mystical theology deal with supererogatory piety, and can scarcely be considered integral, certainly not essential, to theology. Such is in fact a widespread misconception, which the Critic sanctions by his definition of moral theology. It is scarcely surprising then to find, when theologians thus view the matter, that interest in mystical theology is often considered a sign of mental instability. Ascetical theology, in its turn, very often carrying with it definitely gloomy connotations, tends to be regarded as a sort of hobby for spoilsports and misanthropes, and it is quite generally forgotten that “ascetic life is fundamentally the organic development of the body of Christ in a mystical, living union between Christ and the faithful”.¹⁰²

Sometimes ascetical theology is taught in seminaries, but even so, it is often in a dry, abstract, and uninspiring way. The reason is that it can be taught well only by those who practice it: only those who are themselves striving for perfection are safe guides on that way, as St. Peter Alcantara says. Both St. Teresa and St. Francis de Sales require practical prudence and personal experience, as well as learning, in spiritual directors. Of these three qualifications, St. Teresa regards learning as the most important. That may be conceded; but the others are important, too. The difference between a spiritual guide who has no personal experience and one who has is like that between a teacher who gives dry and dutiful account of a country that he has never seen and a traveler who, having lived in that country, studying and admiring its people and customs, is able to give a living, enthusiastic, firsthand account of all he has seen.

Perhaps the best, the most practical and the most authoritative text that could be found for teaching ascetical theology is the *Ascent of Mt. Carmel*. Yet it is not used; and, in fact, seminarians and religious are regularly warned away from the works of this holy Doctor. These books are commonly regarded as “dangerous”, and those who read them are likely to be considered as “deluded,” or at least in immediate danger of delusion. And yet there is in fact no spiritual guide who is safer, clearer, or more pitiless in his exposure of spiritual frauds and delusions than St. John of the Cross. Most textbooks in ascetical theology treat their subject in a speculative and abstract manner, as is shown by the fact that they seldom make much change in those who read or study them. But St. John of the Cross is eminently practical: the effect of studying him, thoughtfully and prayerfully, and with a genuine desire for spiritual advancement, is electric. He begins, not by giving pious subjects for

102. Jurgensmeier: *The Mystical Body of Christ* (Milwaukee: Bruce), p. 120.

merely intellectual contemplation, but by stripping the soul of affections for creatures. That is why the devil so fears him and is so determined to keep his light under a bushel. The devil is content to allow seminarians and priests to grow very clever in handling abstractions; as long as he can carry off the living souls of real men.¹⁰³

In this connection, it must also be noticed, both as illustration and a corroboration of what we have been saying, that seminarians are usually not taught to regard such authors as St. John of the Cross and St. Francis de Sales as serious moral theologians. They are directed to other source books and other authorities. These authors, the greatest masters of applying Christian teachings to the concrete problems of living, are neglected. Certainly their works are praised; but they are not used: they are honored and unread. The reading of such books is regarded as a commendable act of piety, although it is an act of piety that is usually not greatly emphasized; in any event they are not regarded or consulted as serious works of moral theology.

How then is moral theology studied? Chiefly, almost exclusively, from the works of casuistry: From a moral theology from which ascetical and mystical teachings have been carefully removed. Yet even this residue is not left intact. As mentioned above, the important tract on grace has been removed from moral theology or is left there in a summary form or with the emphasis on the speculative problem; so that the principles governing correspondence with grace – the most important practical problem in the whole of theology – are left untaught.¹⁰⁴ St. Thomas included grace in his moral theology because he considered it an intrinsic principle of action. Modern moral theology, besides eliminating this *intrinsic* principle of supernatural activity, carefully retains as part of its study the tract on what St. Thomas calls an extrinsic principle action, namely the tract on law. As a result, it shows a tendency to externalism and legalism.

Even this, however, is not the full extent of the impoverishment that modern moral theology has suffered. Besides the tract on grace, the study of the virtues has also been either removed or at least greatly reduced in these books. In some cases, the study of the moral virtues is eliminated altogether (except justice, which is studied at length, but

103. And St. John of the Cross is certainly for beginners. For a discussion of this point see *Journey in the Night*, by Father Brice, C.P.

104. One moral theology that I have at hand gives nine pages to the subject and treats the practical problem in a footnote. It is a set of three volumes, containing approximately eighteen hundred pages.

chiefly in its external, legalistic aspect). In other cases, they are treated summarily; and they are treated always in an abstract manner: their structure or anatomy is revealed, their inner dynamism or physiology is neglected. That is to say, students are taught how to define and divide these virtues, but not how to practice them. Even the theological virtues suffer neglect; and when they are treated, the chief concern is with the sins that may be committed against them. If one wants to find out how to live the life of faith and charity, he will find scant help in a work of moral theology. He will have to go, with little encouragement from many theologians, to such teachers as St. John of the Cross or St. Francis de Sales for this: and what he learns there will be considered something “extra” – supererogatory piety.

Now contrast this condition of things with moral theology as conceived and taught by St. Thomas Aquinas. The most extensive part of his moral theology – and the largest division in the entire *Summa* – is the *Secunda Secundæ*, which is a tract on the virtues. It is divided into eight parts. The first three divisions are concerned with the theological virtues. While considering the sins against them, the Saint does this always only in the second place, having first developed the positive doctrine concerning them. The next four divisions are concerned respectively with the four cardinal moral virtues and the various virtues related to them. The last division considers special obligations; it compares the active and contemplative lives, treats of religious life, discusses the duty of Christian perfection. Included also are tracts on the beatitudes, the gifts of the Holy Ghost (in relation to the supernatural life and contemplative prayer), and the twelve Fruits. There is also a very beautiful, solid, and practical treatise on prayer. His discussion of sin is truly luminous: he not only defines and divides sin in an abstract way, but gives an extended treatment both to its causes and effects, thereby laying down principles of capital importance for ascetical theology. But all this vast hoard of spiritual riches is carefully guarded against trespassers by the theologians of whom we are speaking, whose notion of theology we have seen set forth by the Critic. If anyone does discover this rich heritage, it is as likely as not because he has strayed in by accident.



That, for the Critic, spiritual theology belongs to the schema and not to his own practical concept is evident, not only from his definition of moral theology, but also, and more directly, from the fact that, as we have seen, he shows no acquaintance even with the terms of spiritual doctrine

as used by its greatest masters and indeed regards the use of such terms as *prima facie* evidence of error. St. John of the Cross and St. Francis de Sales regard the purification of attachments and affections for creatures as a primary principle of spiritual living. The Critic, apparently has never heard of this principle. Yet it is found not only in St. Francis de Sales and St. John of the Cross: it is frequently repeated by St. Thomas in one form or another. We have seen above how, according to this Doctor, the soul is to advance in love by purifying itself, not only of what is contrary to charity, but of all that hinders the movement of our affections towards God. In explaining the commandments he says:

“The first [of the things that increase charity] is withdrawal of the heart from worldly things. For the heart cannot be perfectly given to diverse things. Hence no one can love God and the world. And, therefore, the more our soul withdraws itself from the love of earthly things, the more is it increased in divine love, *Quanto magis ab amore terranorum noster animus elongatur, tanto magis firmatus in dilectione divina.*”¹⁰⁵

But as noticed above, some theologians have also departed from the theology of St. Thomas. Father Garrigou-Lagrange protests vigorously against the complete separation of ascetical and mystical doctrine from moral theology, and he contrasts the misconception of theology which I have been describing with that of the Angelic Doctor:

“On the contrary, moral theology, as expounded in the second part of the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas, keeps all its grandeur and its efficacy for the direction of souls called to the highest perfection. St. Thomas does not, in fact, consider dogmatic and moral theology as two distinct sciences; sacred doctrine, in his opinion, is absolutely one and is of such high perfection that it contains the perfections of both dogmatic and moral theology. In other words, it is eminently speculative and practical, as the science of God from which it springs. That is why he treats in detail in the moral part of his *Summa* not only human acts, precepts, and counsels, but also habitual and actual grace, the infused virtues in general and in particular, the gifts of the Holy Ghost, their fruits, the beatitudes, the active and contemplative life, the degrees of contemplation, grace gratuitously bestowed, such as the gift of miracles, the gift of tongues, prophecy, and rapture, and likewise the religious life and its various forms.

105. Opusc. xxxv, *De Duobus Præceptis Caritatis, etc.*

“Moral theology thus understood evidently contains the principles necessary for leading souls to the highest sanctity. Ascetical and mystical theology is nothing but the application of this broad moral theology to the direction of souls toward ever closer union with God. It presupposes what sacred doctrine teaches about the nature and the properties of Christian virtues and of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and it studies the laws and conditions of their progress from the point of view of perfection.”¹⁰⁶

This author, undoubtedly acquainted with the distinction between precepts and counsels, nevertheless sets down as the *guiding principle of moral theology* the “beautiful doctrine” that the precept of the love of God has *no limit* and that the *perfection* of charity falls under this precept, not, of course, as something to be realized immediately, but as the end towards which *every* Christian *must* tend according to his condition.¹⁰⁷ In this, too, he has the support of Pope Pius XI, who wrote:

“Indeed it was an *absolutely certain* doctrine of his [i.e., St. Thomas] that the love of God should ever continually increase ‘in accordance with the very words of the commandment: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart; for the whole and the perfect are one same thing... Now the end of the commandment is charity from a pure heart, and a good conscience and an unfeigned faith, as the Apostle says (I Tim., 1, 5), but no standard or measure is applicable to the end, but only to such things as conduce to the end.’ This is the very reason why the perfection of charity falls under the commandment as the end to which we ought all to strive each according to his degree.”¹⁰⁸

Sufficit. The subject is a vast one. It cannot be exhausted here. Enough has been said to show that the Critic shows no acquaintance with the spiritual doctrine of the saints. He notes with displeasure, that I have ended my first *Reply* with the words of Jesus to the lawyers:

“Woe to you lawyers, for you have taken away the key of knowledge: you yourselves have not entered in, and those that were entering in, you have hindered.” (Luke 2, 52).

This quotation, he says, is evidently put down as a warning to the

106. *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

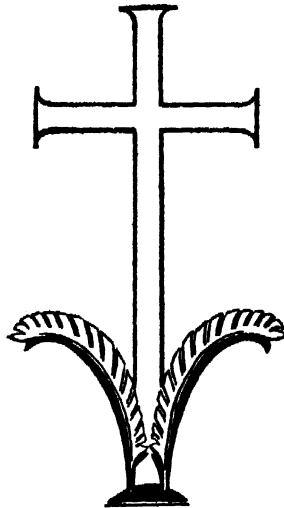
107. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

108. *Studiorum ducem*. The quotation from St. Thomas is from II II, 184, 3.

former Critic. It is. And it is also a warning to the present one: a warning, however, not spoken by me but by the Master of us all: and not only to the Jewish lawyers, now long since passed to their reward, but to all those who use knowledge in order to evade the truth. Let them look to it, these Critics, as they stand like grim sentinels, directing the picked Catholic youth of the nation, for whose instruction they are responsible, to vain fables, cold speculations and the ethics of reason, while at the same time warning them zealously away from the personal knowledge and love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which is to be purchased only by renouncing all affections and attachments for the things of this world, as also by abandoning the merely natural motives in which these affections manifest themselves.

REPLY TO A CRITICISM,
Written by Father Gerald Vann, O.P.
and Published by *Orate Fratres*
(Jan. 1947),

Of the book *Applied Christianity*.



by Father John J. Hugo,

Typed and Duplicated by the Author.
[1947?]

“For who among men knows the things of a man
save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so, the
things of God no one knows but the Spirit of God.”

– I Cor. 2, 11.

IN REPLY TO ORATE FRATRES

It is easier to open up questions than to solve them, easier to stir up dust than to settle it. And the issues raised by Father Vann are so numerous and of such importance that there could be no hope of answering him in an article. Fortunately, it is not necessary; *Applied Christianity* has withstood such attacks before. To two of these, in which all of Father Vann's charges are substantially contained, I have fully replied in *Nature and the Supernatural: a Defense of the Evangelic Ideal*. Those interested in seeing the issues involved discussed more fully may find their answers here. What I wish to do in this article is meet the more important objections and, chiefly, to repudiate certain teachings which Father Vann, through a misrepresentation of *Applied Christianity*, would thrust upon me.



The first criticism that presents itself for consideration – the only one that is really new, and which will also illustrate the method used throughout – revolves around the words quoted from *Applied Christianity*, that “we should not be interested in the doings of our neighbors.” These words are offered as evidence of the charge, recurrent throughout the article, that *Applied Christianity* outlaws love for neighbor.

Truly, if such an accusation could be proved it would be serious. But Father Vann does not attempt to prove it. He quotes no other words besides those given, makes no effort to supply their context and does not even give a page reference for them. The offending words are found on page 185 [p. 195 our edition] of the 1944 edition of *Applied Christianity*, from which Father Vann quotes (page 187 of the 1946 printing). And of course their context reveals their meaning – reveals also that they have nothing to do with fraternal charity. They appear in a chapter entitled “Mortification,” under the sub-heading, “Mortification of the Hearing”, and are a warning against idle talk, gossip, and a vain curiosity regarding the doings of our neighbor. The advice they give is quite in line with that of all the great spiritual masters – who cannot be presumed to be attacking charity. Thus the author of the *Imitation* writes a chapter on the subject: “*That it is not good to search curiously another man's life*” (III, 24):

“My son, saith our Lord, look thou be not curious in searching another man's life, neither busy thyself with things that belong not to thee. What is this or that to thee? Follow thou Me! What is it to thee, whether this man be good or bad; or whether he say, or

do, this or that? Thou needest not answer for another man's deeds, but for thine own deeds thou must needs answer."

A religious, we might further suppose, is, if anything, bound more strictly than others by the law of charity. And yet St. John of the Cross says to the religious seeking perfection – and his advice may be extended to all who wish to live an interior life – that

"...he must needs live in the monastery as if no other person lived there; and thus he should never intermeddle, either in word or in thought, with the things that happen in the community, nor with those of individuals, nor must he take note of anything concerning them, be it good or evil, nor of their personal qualities. *And even though the world should come to an end*, he must neither remark upon them nor intermeddle with them." (*Counsels*)

Thus *Applied Christianity* has no apologies to make for the advice it gives for mortifying curiosity and correcting the faults of the tongue. In this matter, as in all others, the little book but follows and diffuses the doctrine of the saints. Surely a priest whom *Orate Fratres* describes as "one of the foremost spiritual writers of our time" is not unfamiliar with this line of thought and of the need to mortify the hearing and the tongue.

What is even more surprising is that, by thus lifting words from their context and distorting the meaning of *Applied Christianity* – then returning twice again to this misinterpretation, as a matter of some importance, without in any instance supplying the context of the statement or attempting to investigate further the teaching of the book on the matter concerned – he adopts a method of criticism that scarcely conforms to the ethics that govern scholarship and criticism. Yet we must note here that such is Father Vann's method throughout: incomplete quotations, disregard of context, omission of page references (so that readers are not given the opportunity to refer to the words of *Applied Christianity* and study them in their natural setting), suppression of modifying words or clauses, failure to present the teaching of the book fully and *in its own words*, as also to study the relation of its parts to other parts or to the whole: through the aid of such methods as these, which would be disdained by secular writers of scholarly conscience or sense of honor, Father Vann writes, not a criticism, but a falsification of *Applied Christianity* and then of course has no trouble effecting its condemnation.

Since one is loath to attribute such usage to malice, and is unable to lay it to ignorance, there remains but one other possible explanation, i.e., the failure, apparent throughout Father Vann's article, to grasp both sides of the paradoxes of Christianity. It is his contention, indeed, that *Applied Christianity* does not comprehend these paradoxes; but, as a matter of fact, it is he himself who does not recognize them when he sees them, although he lectures well enough on them in the abstract; like a scientist who has, perhaps, written books on the laws of heredity but fails to recognize his grandson. Thus Father Vann knows that Jesus said we should love our neighbor as ourselves. But he is quite ignorant of the duty of universal detachment, the corollary of total love for God, and therefore limits to a prohibition of mortal sin (*Orate Fratres*, p. 97) the strong words of Jesus exhorting His followers to the practice of such detachment, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14, 16)

In brief, the trouble is that Father Vann, unable to reconcile the duty of detachment with the duty of fraternal charity, simply denies the need of any detachment other than detachment from sin. Of supernatural detachment, the detachment taught by the saints, of detachment from all creatures, he knows nothing and is scandalized by its assertion in *Applied Christianity*. Although he says truly enough that we must learn to grasp both extremes of the paradoxes of Christianity – which is a *complexio oppositorum* – he himself is unable to do so. And therefore, because he sees that *Applied Christianity* insists strongly on detachment, he takes it as a matter of course (without bothering to check his pre-judgment by a study of the book) that it slights or denies the duty of love. Nothing could be further from the truth. *Applied Christianity* grasps both sides of the paradox. The vigor of its insistence on detachment is matched by the energy with which it urges the duty of charity towards our neighbor; in the language of Chesterton, it gets over the difficulty of combining furious opposites by keeping them both, and by keeping them both furious. One can hardly be too detached from one's neighbor; one can hardly love one's neighbor too much.

Thus, besides recommending the particular practices of love of neighbor in a variety of places, *Applied Christianity* devotes a chapter to expounding the doctrine concerned with this virtue. Among other things it says (p. 103 [p. 108 our edition]):

"But the way to show and prove our love for God is by loving our neighbor, since only in him do we see God. This is so true that Jesus, having reduced the essentials of Christianity to the

love of God and the love of neighbor goes even further and reduces them *in practice* to the love of neighbor: ‘All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do you also to them. For this is the law and the prophets.’ Therefore, in practice, perfection consists in loving our neighbor...”

And again:

“Since love of God and love of neighbor both spring from one virtue, the measure of anyone’s love for God is his love for his neighbor. Specifically, one’s love for God is equal to the love that one has for the man whom one loves least (or hates most). For God gives us the gift of charity in proportion as we give others charity. ‘For with the same measure that you shall mete withal, it shall be measured to you again.’” (Luke 6, 38)

The next paragraph is even more emphatic:

“Moreover, our love of neighbor must go to the extreme...”

In various other places, directions are given for carrying out this duty in practice (for example, Part V, Chapter 1). I would challenge Father Vann, or anyone else, to offer a more cogent doctrinal basis for practicing charity towards one’s neighbor or a greater urgency in recommending it.

Both duties are then to be insisted upon; both are in fact insisted upon in *Applied Christianity*. And the principle it uses to reconcile these apparent opposites is simple. “Charity is a virtue by which we love God as our highest good on account of Himself, *and our neighbor on account of God.*” (Sabetti-Barrett: *Compendium Theologiae Moralis*) By loving our neighbor (which includes also our relatives) *on account of God* – that is, by making God the formal motive of our love of neighbor – we at once fulfill the duties of charity and detachment. We fulfill the duty of charity because we do love our neighbor, and that in the loftiest way possible, not only acknowledging his goodness, but recognizing that goodness as a participation in the divine goodness. And we practice detachment because, by making God the motive of our love, we strip ourselves of interested, selfish, or merely sensual motives of love: and it is precisely the object of mortification to destroy pride and sensuality.

That is the doctrine of *Applied Christianity* – a doctrine which it takes from the Gospel and the example of Jesus. For, as Father Leen said, “Jesus is wholly supernatural in outlook.” (*The True Vine and its Branches*, p. 21) Hence, His love for His mother, for example (as,

conversely, her love for Him), was not natural, but supernatural. Or rather, if it was natural in the physical sense that it proceeded from His natural will, it was supernatural *in the moral and spiritual order* – supernatural, that is, in its final end and motive. And whatever excellence he may find in natural motives of love, will Father Vann quarrel with a Christian desire to imitate Jesus?

Moreover, why is Father Vann so alarmed at this emphasis on the duty of supernaturalizing our actions? Does he fear that grace will injure nature? Does he not know that “grace presupposes nature and does not destroy it”? Yes, indeed – he himself quotes this axiom; but out of zeal for nature, fearful, it seems, lest grace should crush it. If he really believes in the harmony between nature and grace, how can he entertain this fear? How can he believe that grace would do other than ennoble nature? How can he dread that the natural physical power of love would be weakened by being supernaturalized? Was it weakened in Jesus? If not, then why should Father Vann fear that our loving friends or relatives on account of God will rob our love of vigor and worth?

Father Vann’s attitude here is that of the practical naturalism which I have described elsewhere as *pious naturalism*: an attitude jealous of the rights of nature, suspicious of the encroachments of grace; eloquent in describing the goodness of nature, unconcerned about the infinitely greater goodness of grace. The champions of this school, negligent of the demands of grace, but ever ready to cry “Grace perfects nature” in defense of the fullest rights of nature, are naively unaware, as is shown in their very alarm at the mere mention of the exigencies of grace, that they have no *practical* belief in the harmony of grace and nature and have forgotten also, that since grace perfects nature, nature is of itself insufficient and must be perfected by our corresponding with grace, that is, by our living a supernatural life.



What is true concerning love of neighbor is also true of love of creatures in general: we have a double duty towards them, a duty at once of detachment and love. And this is the doctrine of *Applied Christianity*, a doctrine then which, again, Father Vann simply misrepresents when he holds that its emphasis on contempt for creatures excludes love for them. And the cause of his misunderstanding is the same as before: inability to comprehend the paradoxes of Christianity.

As a witness to the fact that *Applied Christianity* does not fall into the error here charged, I will not bother to quote this or that line – although

many quotations could easily be given – I adduce the fact that one of its central and essential principles insists on the duty of loving creatures. The principle in question – one of four into which the book resolves the whole spiritual life – is the doctrine of the Samples. This doctrine simply puts in popular and easily understood form the metaphysical principle of analogy, i.e., the principle that every creature, having been created by God, is an analogue of God, that is, a likeness in a different order. *Applied Christianity* thus holds that every creature is a likeness or reflection, a vestige or a sample of God, reminding us of God, teaching us of God, enabling us to glorify God in all His creation. Thus, it insists on the intrinsic excellence and goodness of all creatures: unless indeed Father Vann, who does not hesitate to charge me with near-heresy, would also, by insisting that I regard creatures as evil, accuse me of devil-worship!

At the same time, *Applied Christianity* does enjoin detachment, even contempt for creatures. But there is no need to apologize for this.¹⁰⁹ Does not the liturgy itself – do not the lessons of a wise and holy Mother – teach us, oh, so often, that we should even pray to despise earthly things, *despicere terrena*? Here, again, *Applied Christianity* does not forget either side of the paradox, grasps the light side with the dark side: thus it says (p. 111 [p. 117 our edition]):

“We may and should love the creatures of this world if we love them simply as they mirror the divine perfections, but not if we use them merely to serve our selfish desire for pleasure; as we have seen, all creatures are to be employed solely for the glory of God.”

Is not this but to teach, in Father Vann’s own words, that we must

109. Father Vann animadverts to the statement in *Applied Christianity* – of course without page reference or context indicated – that earthly joys bring only disgust and revulsion. The passage, however, as the context shows (p. 72 [p. 77 our edition]), is not a doctrinal statement, does not therefore imply that creatures are evil or, in themselves, even disgusting. It is speaking of those who give themselves only or chiefly to the enjoyment of earthly pleasures and says that “*in the end*” these joys bring disgust and revulsion. Father Vann omits the phrase “in the end” – which throws the whole statement from the doctrinal into the practical order. He might have observed also that the entire thought in this passage was taken bodily from a homily by Pope St. Gregory the Great, who speaks of the enjoyment of creatures as producing satiety (*saturitas*) and *fastidium* (which Cassell’s English Latin Dictionary translates as *disgust, aversion, loathing*). *Applied Christianity* has thus, at any rate, high authority for its “errors”!

cure our tendency to love the things of this world “possessively” or “selfishly”? And in speaking of “despising” creatures, *Applied Christianity*, ever mindful of these paradoxical duties, does not fail to define the sense in which we may use the expression. Thus it says, in the chapter explaining the doctrine of contempt of the world “that we should despise them *in comparison with the infinite excellence and loveliness of God.*” (p. 110 [p. 115 our edition])

Here, as with loving our neighbor, the principle of reconciliation between detachment and love is supernatural motivation. We detach ourselves from creatures when we give up our merely possessive, sensual, or egoist love for them! we love them, not only rightly, but as Christians, in accord with our duty to “*walk worthy of the Gospel,*” when the love of God is our motive for loving them.

Father Vann quotes M. Jacques Maritain, who describes the way in which saints and mystics love creatures, as opposing the teaching of *Applied Christianity*. We find no such opposition; rather we find M. Maritain’s words a confirmation of this teaching, for, aside from the fact that he speaks of the saints also as *despising* creatures, he also says that the saint “cherishes them in and for Whom (God) he loves.” This is simply to state, in accord with what we have said that the saint loves creatures *from a supernatural motive*. Moreover, upon checking the reference it will be found that Father Vann has treated Maritain’s words exactly as he has treated those of *Applied Christianity*, that is, he does not indicate the context of the words he quotes and he also suppresses a very significant clause. The suppressed clause excludes from consideration in the passage the love of covetousness, or cupidity, whereby creatures are loved, not for themselves, but in the interests of the one loving them. And the context discloses that Maritain is concerned specifically with saints and mystics, that is, to souls purified by a long asceticism; to these he attributes a love distinct from that of cupidity, namely, a love of friendship for God, in which the saint embraces all creatures. It is *only* this love of friendship that Maritain’s words are meant to describe. *Applied Christianity*, on the other hand, is dealing with the generality of imperfect Christians; and its concern is precisely with the love of covetousness, by which the imperfect tend to love creatures selfishly, the aim being to show how such love is to be purified and ennobled, i.e., by a supernatural motive, it also describes the supernatural love of creatures, such as M. Maritain speaks of (see, for example, p. 20 [1946 edition]); but for those who are not *yet* saints it emphasizes the need of purification for the soul that it may become capable of such love. Thus *Applied Christianity* and the passage from Maritain are treating of different problems. Nevertheless, in the one

essential point, that of the motive, the latter corroborates the former. Let Father Vann be answered by his own witness.



As to what is meant by “the world” and what a Christian’s duty is to “the world,” the reader may see for himself that it is Father Vann, and not *Applied Christianity* who again lets the paradoxes of Christianity get away from him, emphasizing one side of a truth while neglecting the other side at the expense of the whole. In this case he would have us love “the world,” and quotes in support of his contention the words of our Lord, “*God so loved the world...*” And so he holds it as a reproach that *Applied Christianity* should speak of despising the world.

But has Father Vann forgotten that the Son of Him who “*so loved the world,*” on the eve of His Passion, after praying for the apostles and their converts, added, “*I pray not for the world*”? Has he forgotten that the Saviour of “the world” in one sense, called the devil the “prince of the world” in another sense? Father Vann quotes the words of Father McNabb: “If you don’t love the world, don’t preach to it – preach to yourself.” There is a sense in which, as we have seen, that advice is sound – in the sense in which the creatures of the world are samples of God, and our neighbors the highest samples: it was this world that God looked upon and saw that it was good. But there is another sense in which the expression “the world” is used; and in this sense I may quote to Father Vann the words of a greater than Father McNabb: “*Love not the world nor the things that are in the world.*” (John 2, 15)

Thus, as some unfortunate reasoners are impaled by logical dilemmas, Father Vann is impaled by his own paradox. But *Applied Christianity* grasps both sides of the dilemma, when for example it says (p. 110 [p. 115 our edition]):

“Contempt of the world does not imply that the things of the world are evil. On the contrary, they are good; but they are only a natural good, whereas man is destined to a supernatural good.”

Even when we speak of the world as good, there is still a sense in which we are not to love it. We will let Newman explain. Despite the title of his sermon, “The World Our Enemy” (we hope the title does not scandalize Father Vann, who, alas, cannot now offer Father McNabb’s sage advice to its author), Newman does not forget that “the world” in a sense is good. He says

“By the world, then, is meant this course of things which we see carried on by means of human agency, with all its duties and pursuits. It is not necessarily a sinful system; rather it is framed, as I have said, by God Himself, and therefore cannot be otherwise than good.”

Then he goes on:

And yet even thus considering it, we are bid not to love the world: even in this sense the world is an enemy of our souls, and for this reason, because the love of it is dangerous to beings circumstanced as we are, *things in themselves good being not good to us sinners.*” (*Parochial and Plain Sermons*, VII, 111)

Should Father Vann think that there is some danger of exaggerating the need to hate the world as our enemy, we put down for him also the following words of the great Cardinal Pie:

“Separated and despoiled of Christ, human nature fully constitutes [let the reader note the comprehensiveness of this definition] what the Sacred Scriptures call *the world*; that world of which Jesus is not (John 8, 23), for which He will not pray (*Ibid.*, 17, 9), which He curses (Matt 18; 7); that world whose prince and head is the devil (John 16, 11) and whose wisdom is the enemy of God (Rom, 8, 7), so that to wish to be the friend of the world is to become the adversary of God (James 4, 4); that world which the rewarding Christ will not know, because it knows not Christ the Saviour, *qui ignorat ignorabitur* (I Cor. 14, 38), and which will receive the terrible sentence: *‘I know you not’* (Luke 13, 25-27); that world whose ways lead to hell (*Et in fine illorum, inferi.* – Eccl., 21, 11),” (Quoted by Matteo Liberatore, S.J. *L’Église et L’État*, p. 155)

Will Father Vann’s inability to comprehend paradoxes lead him to love *that* world? We trust not. In any event, it should by this time be perfectly obvious that, despite his nice little lecture on the paradoxes of Christianity and the need to grasp both the “happy” and the “gloomy” sayings of our Lord at one and the same time as “two complementary aspects of one and the same wisdom” – after this lecture, of whose truth there can be no doubt, he forthwith forgets his own wise counsel by invariably emphasizing but one of the complementary aspects. On the other hand, *Applied Christianity*, while not claiming to be a treatise on these paradoxes, has in every case grasped them wholly: in recognizing the sense in which we should love even our enemies as well as the sense in

which we hate even our mothers and fathers; in teaching that we should despise creatures, but also that creatures are good and participate in the divine goodness; in admonishing to the extreme of charity, in order to bring the world to Christ, but also the extreme of hatred so far as the world is the enemy of Christ. To Father Vann we therefore say: *Medice, cura teipsum*.



Not only is Father Vann unable to grasp both sides of the paradoxes of which he speaks; the advice that he gives, even concerning the side which he can see, is not sound. He says that “we are taught quite clearly that natural *affections* have to be supernaturalized...” Unfortunately, he does not say by *whom* we are taught this. Accordingly, his statement stands on his own word – the word of one whom *Orate Fratres* calls “one of the foremost spiritual writers of our time.” But I find the following words written by St. John of the Cross – whom the Church has designated a Doctor of the Church:

“The reason for which it is necessary for the soul, in order to attain to divine union with God, to pass through this dark night of mortification of the desires and denial of pleasures in all things is because *all the affections which it has for creatures are pure darkness in the eyes of God...*” (*Ascent*, 1, 4)

Again:

“The reason is that two contraries (even as philosophy teaches us) cannot coexist in one person; and that darkness, *which is affection* for creatures, and light, which is God, are contrary to each other...” (*Ibid.*)

Explaining *his* principle – which is thus *not* taught by St. John of the Cross, despite Father Vann’s claim to speak for the saints and mystics of the Church – the critic goes on:

“It means that (a) every vestige of the false self, of egoism, has to be swept away from them [i.e., from our natural affections]; and (b) that thus purified, all lesser motives have to be included in, and subsumed under, the love of God, included in, not excluded from.” (p. 103)

As to the first part (a), we quite agree; although when *Applied Christianity* makes that point Father Vann accuses it of over-emphasizing

original sin. As to the second point, if Father Vann means that these lesser natural motives are sinless and therefore *compatible* with a state of grace, of course we again agree. But if he means that they are the most perfect motives that a Christian can have, that by means of such motives Christians best fulfill their destiny or carry out most fully the precept to love God with the whole heart, or that priests should confine themselves to urging the faithful to adopt but natural motives – here we demur, here also Father Vann runs afoul of St. John of the Cross, who, on this matter again, teaches a different doctrine to those striving for the fullness of Christian life:

“Secondly ... every pleasure that presents itself to the senses, *if it be not purely for the honor and glory of God*, must be renounced and completely rejected for the love of Jesus Christ...” (*Ibid.*, 1, 13)

Father Vann cites the example of Jesus at Cana in favor of his doctrine. As though *Applied Christianity* had told its readers that they should not drink wine, that wine is evil! it simply told them that “*whether they eat or drink*,” they should do all things “*in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” (Col. 3, 17) That is, it tells them that if they drink wine, they should do so from a supernatural motive, not from a mere attachment for creatures. Would Father Vann dare affirm that the motives of Jesus, whether at Cana or anywhere else, were other than supernatural? “*I do always the things that are pleasing to My Father*.” (John 8, 29) Moreover, – as a further light on the matter of drinking wine – if Jesus “*came eating and drinking*,” there was another who came “*neither eating, nor drinking*.” (Matt. 11, 18) Of St. John the Baptist the Angel said – and are we wrong in thinking it said in praise? – “*He shall drink no wine or strong drink*.” (Luke 1, 15) Of this same John, – who drank no wine or strong drink – Jesus said, “*Amen I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist*.” (Matt. 11, 11) Will Father Vann forbid us from following, if we choose, the example of this great saint whose name the *Confiteor* mentions right after the name of St. Michael the Archangel?

Of course, there is a sense in which we not only may but must retain our natural affections for creatures – in the sense that, to love them at all, we must retain the natural *physical* activity of our natural will. But to speak of that kind of love is to speak as a philosopher not as a spiritual writer. In the spiritual order, charity or love of God should fix the final end of all our activity: even the natural virtues, St. Thomas says, are not true or complete virtues, unless they are so informed by charity. (II II, 23,

7) And since a motive is but the will's grasp on its end, it is clear that for a Christian all motives should be supernatural and ultimately of charity: for only in this way may all his actions be "formed" by charity. So that the doctrine we are explaining here is that of St. Thomas as well as St. John of the Cross. And was not the Order of Preachers appointed to extend, rather than to combat, the doctrine of the Angelic Doctor?

Since Father Vann is ignorant of the *principle of detachment*, so important in spiritual writing – indeed, since he simply denies this principle, it is to be expected that his practical counsels, requiring its application, will be erroneous also. He chooses the example of dancing and objects to the teaching of *Applied Christianity* that Christians should be detached from such recreations, should not set their affections on them, and, if engaging in them, should do so for "social utility with the ultimate purpose of glorifying God." He quotes St. Thomas in vindication of the natural goodness of pleasure; as though anyone had said it was evil – as though St. John of the Cross, in recommending the abandonment of *voluntary* pleasure in the axiom quoted above, were implying that pleasure is evil. Father Vann tells us that for St. Thomas, "Virtue has for one of its effects precisely to make the right action also pleasurable": as though there were any parity between the pleasure proceeding from virtue and that belonging to self-indulgence; or as though the fact that pleasure is an effect of our actions requires that we should make it the motive of our actions.

(By way of digression, let it be noted that *Applied Christianity*, far from denying St. Thomas' doctrine on pleasure, reproduces it – see page 76 [p. 79 our edition] of the 1944 edition. And ever sensitive, as we have seen, to the paradoxes of Christianity, it holds, after St John of the Cross, that mortification does *not* extend to *involuntary* pleasure, that is, to pleasure as *an effect*, in the critic's words. It is *voluntary* pleasure – pleasure that is taken as a deliberate *end*, instead of as a mere means or effect – that is to be mortified.)

Quite apart from the critic's false reasoning, be it said that the rule given in *Applied Christianity* for dancing and other such activities was taken bodily from St. Francis de Sales. If Father Vann objects to it, his position as "one of the foremost spiritual writers of our time" should make it easily possible for him to take the matter up with one of the foremost spiritual guides of the entire Church!

St. Francis (*Introduction to the Devout Life*) speaks quite clearly of recreations and makes explicit mention of dancing. First of all, he lays it down as a general rule for all recreations:

“But, above all, Philothea, take particular care not to set your *affections* upon these amusements...” (III, 31)

This is precisely the doctrine to which Father Vann objects in *Applied Christianity*. Let Father Vann ask this saint, not me, how one is to take recreation without setting his affections on it.

As for dancing itself, St. Francis goes on to prescribe, as does *Applied Christianity*, a pure intention. (III, 33) And what is more, he makes some interesting suggestions as to how Philothea shall conduct herself on the dance floor. The rule given by *Applied Christianity* for dancing provides Father Vann the opportunity for his finest shaft of irony:

“If a man likes dancing, then he can only allow himself to dance, if he wants to avoid sin, when he has somehow or other killed the love of dancing and is able to cavort around the room with dour face and dragging feet and a mind set about social utility.” (*Orate Fratres*, p. 103)

Like most of Father Vann’s statements of the teaching of *Applied Christianity*, this one is a misstatement. For example, *Applied Christianity* is not addressing itself to one who is merely trying to avoid sin, but rather to one, like Philothea, who is seeking after Christian perfection. Then it does not say, even for those pursuing perfection, that they should attempt to kill all enjoyment of their recreation; it simply teaches, with St. Francis de Sales, that Christians should not be attached to such pleasures, should not set their affections upon them. But what is most to the point here is Father Vann’s dour-faced dancer meditating on the social utility of his cavortings. In presenting this unhappy picture, no doubt Father Vann thinks he has shown the utter absurdity of the teaching of *Applied Christianity*. Yet St. Francis de Sales – not *Applied Christianity* – does in fact suggest that Philothea meditate while she dances. And like the gentle and considerate saint he was, he even suggests subjects for her meditation! She may, as she glides over the floor – in the arms of her partner? – consider that, during the time she was at the ball, “innumerable souls were burning in the flames of hell for the sins which they had committed or occasioned by their dancing.” Another fruitful subject would be to consider how, while she is at the ball, others, religious and devout persons, are “at the very time in the presence of God, singing His praises and contemplating His beauty”; and that she should remember “how much more profitably was their time employed” than hers. (*Ibid.*, III 33)

Well, yes; perhaps social utility is a dull subject. But then I am *merely suggesting*, to use a phrase dear to *Orate Fratres*, and will have no quarrel

with Philothea's modern glamorous counterpart if she prefers to meditate on how much more profitably she could be spending her time in chanting the Office, or on the number of souls in hell through sins committed on the dance floor. *Non disputandum de gustibus*.

Father Vann, so to speak, gives the game away; here he reveals the background of his attack and the reason for it.

He writes:

“...thus purified, all lesser motives have to be *included in*, and *subsumed under*, the love of God.”

And he emphasizes this:

“Included in, not excluded from.”

These words constitute a denial of the doctrine of detachment, the doctrine asserting that, to grow in the love of God, we must free ourselves from attachments or affections for creatures. It is a denial of the need for detachment from all natural goods, Father Vann, as we have seen, acknowledging only the need of detachment from sin. Further, it is a denial of the practical consequences of our supernatural elevation and, by implication, of this supernatural elevation itself, for the need for detachment from *all things*, and not merely from sin, follows from the fact of our supernatural elevation. Thus, to quote from Father Garrigou-Lagrange, a confrere of Father Vann and a much more authoritative interpreter of St. Thomas:

“This [the fact that we are “called to a supernatural end of infinite elevation”] obliges us to *detachment* in regard to *all* that belongs only to the earth, *or is purely natural*, in regard to all that cannot be a means of drawing nearer to God and of leading souls to Him.” (*Three Ages of the Interior Life*, I, 294; italics mine)

It is likewise because our elevation to the supernatural plane constitutes a practical demand for detachment that St. John of the Cross tells us – not that natural affections are to be supernaturalized, as Father Vann would have it, but that they are “pure darkness in the eyes of God” and are therefore to be mortified. Can Father Vann perhaps look for some support from the more suave Francis de Sales? By no means: the saints all preach one doctrine. And Francis de Sales, being a saint, judges actions from the supernatural plane, as a Christian, and not merely from the natural plane as an ethnician. So, fully aware that recreation is not sinful, the saint nevertheless goes on:

“Play, dancing, feasting, dress, and theatrical shows, being things which, considered in their substance, are not evil, but indifferent, and such as may be used either well or ill; nevertheless, as all these things are dangerous, *to bear an affection to them is still more dangerous*. I say, then, Philothea, that although it be lawful to play, to dance, to dress, to feast, or to be present at innocent comedies, yet *to have an affection to such things* is not only contrary to devotion, but also extremely hurtful and dangerous.” (*Devout Life*, I, 23)

Does this sound like saying that affection for creatures, or motives deriving from such affections, are to be “included in” and “subsumed under” our love for God? By whom then are we taught, and “quite clearly”, that affections for creatures and the motives proceeding from them are to be *included in, not excluded from*, the love of God? What is the authority for this statement? And by an “authority” we mean here, not any Catholic writer or scholar, but one who is a doctor of the Church, Perhaps St. Thomas – who will provide solid doctrine without the “exaggerations” of spiritual writers? But alas, Father Vann will find no comfort there:

“It is manifest that the more intensely the human heart gives itself to one object, the more it must be withdrawn from many others. Hence, the more perfectly the mind of man gives itself to the love of God, *by so much is it recalled from affection for things temporal, ab affectu temporalium revocatur*.” (*Opusculum De Perfectione Vitæ Spiritualis*, VI)

It would be interesting to have this mystery dispelled, to learn the name of the authority who teaches *quite clearly* that “natural affections have to be supernaturalized.”¹¹⁰

We are confident that there is no such authority: that this principle, poor orphan, finds its sole support in the school to which Father Vann evidently belongs. Is this school perhaps inaugurating a new system of spirituality? No; it is merely reproducing an old system of *ethics*. Father Vann’s statement, his manifest contradiction of the traditional teaching of the saints, reveals what he is: not a spiritual teacher at all, but a mere philosopher, a humanist, an ethician, who “*savors not the things that are of God but the things that are of man*.” (Matt. 16, 23) And this is clear from his complete and openly advertised ignorance of the principle of detachment, the quintessential principle distinguishing supernatural judgment or prudence from that merely ethical reason which can judge moral disorder only in terms of sin. This principle of detachment – the

doctrine of the cross reduced to practice – is “foolishness” to Father Vann, as it is ever foolishness to mere natural reason. Because it is foolishness to him it reveals the origin of his objections – the spirit of man that understands not and savors not the things of God; for “*the things of God no one knows but the Spirit of God.*” (I Cor. 2, 11) It discloses that his thought is but the thinly if brightly veneered naturalism that so frequently passes as spirituality today, the school of pseudo-piety that, denying the cross, desires to consecrate worldliness to God. it has its doctors – and of this school Father Vann may well be one of the foremost; – but the saints, who speak another language, tell us that “affection for God and affection for creatures are *contraries*, and thus there cannot be contained within one will affection for creatures and affection for God.” (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, I, VI)



The worst distortion that *Applied Christianity* suffers at Father Vann’s hands is when he speaks of the book’s teaching on the relationship of nature and grace: and this is also the core and center of his accusations. According to him,

110. The phrase “natural affections” has two meanings; and in a different meaning than that used here, we have earlier in this article said that natural affections may be supernaturalized. It may be used in a *physical* or *ontological* sense, to describe the physical activity of the will; in this sense natural affections may and should be supernaturalized. It may be used in the *moral* sense to describe the acts or habit by which the will freely attaches itself to creatures. It is the latter sense that is of particular interest in the study of spiritual doctrine; the former sense belongs properly to philosophy. We have already described the confusion that results from forgetting these two quite distinct meanings (See *Nature and The Supernatural*, p. 230 *et seq.* [p. 83 our edition]) Father Vann despite his repeated boast of clarity has fallen into this confusion. In the present context the expression is used in the moral sense, because it is a question of affections freely bestowed on an object; this is also evident from the fact that Father Vann is speaking of motives, which belong to the moral order. Yet while talking about affections in the moral sense, he justifies them by using the term in the physical sense – a logical jump that is scarcely compatible with clarity.

Father Vann is equally unable to distinguish between mere involuntary “likings” (which we cannot get rid of) and deliberate free attachments. Hence the puerilities he writes about dancing, drinking, Our Lord at Cana, and with the children.

“Fr. Hugo’s picture of life as a Christian should lead it, is a picture of two entirely separate, and inimical regions: one filled with natural things, which are essentially deeds of darkness, the other filled with the supernatural which somehow or another has no contact with nature.” (*Orate Fratres*, p. 101)

Now that is simply a falsification. According to *Applied Christianity*, the relation of the two orders is very close indeed, The central and essential rule of the book, given in Chapters III and IV, is that Christians are to fulfill their supernatural destiny by elevating their natural activities to the plane of the supernatural in correspondence with grace. As a preliminary to setting forth this rule, the book has explicitly laid down, not that nature or the deeds of nature are “deeds of darkness” but that they are intrinsically and essentially good and that they are therefore capable of being elevated, through correspondence with grace, to the supernatural plane. Father Vann asks, “But what actions can we perform apart from nature?” And he answers, “None,” going on to explain, exactly as *Applied Christianity* explains, how natural actions are made supernatural. How, then, can Father Vann say, “Fr. Hugo will have none of this”? Such a statement, characteristic of his method of criticism, is made without attempting to cite “Fr. Hugo’s alleged teaching from *Applied Christianity*.” Father Vann is not criticizing *Applied Christianity*: he is condemning what he is determined to make *Applied Christianity* say, without allowing its author the right to speak for himself at all.

The key to this distortion, and to Father Vann’s whole misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the teaching of *Applied Christianity* revolves around the word “natural.” He says:

“The word ‘natural,’ he [“Fr. Hugo”] tells us, is to be referred to fallen nature only; and he then equates it with ‘sensual, egotistic’; and no doubt an author has a right to define his own terms, though a definition so at variance with current usage is inviting misunderstanding. But we find in fact that, despite the definition, or because of his theological presuppositions the author is identifying ‘natural’ with ‘human’ and then consigning the whole field of human activity to outer darkness.” (*Ibid.*, p. 102)

This, then, is the origin of Father Vann’s misinterpretation of *Applied Christianity* on the subject of nature.

Mark: in saying that “natural” refers to fallen nature *only*, he gives no page reference, offers no direct quotation to support this alleged definition. And of course he could not.

Applied Christianity (all this is in Part I, Chapter III) carefully distinguishes between two uses of the word nature: nature considered in itself, in its essential stuff and properties and activities, and in this sense it is good; and nature in the concrete, that is, fallen human nature – since all human nature is fallen – in which, while retaining its essential excellence, its activities are prone to be turned awry by concupiscence. And *Applied Christianity*, dealing with actual men, men as they are, says that it will usually, though not always or necessarily, speak of nature in the concrete sense.

Father Vann objects to my speaking of nature in the concrete. But to refuse to speak of it thus is to deny the fact of the Fall and its consequences. And to speak of the Fall and its consequences does not imply, as Father Vann would have it, that nature is entirely or substantially corrupt. It merely implies that concupiscence, however it is explained, is an important fact to be reckoned with in dealing with man in his actual condition. Actually, *Applied Christianity* makes no effort to provide a doctrinal explanation of the Fall or of concupiscence, concerning itself only with the fact; but, if Father Vann is interested, I have provided the explanation that goes with it in *Nature and the Supernatural* (as also in *A Sign of Contradiction*); and it is not what Father Vann surmises.

Applied Christianity, dealing with actual men, men as they are, men in their *de facto* condition, says that it will usually – though not always or *only* or necessarily – speak of nature in the concrete sense. And mark: it does not hold that nature even in the concrete, is *evil*. It simply holds that nature, in the concrete, is prone to be led by concupiscence. This concupiscence *may* lead to sin, but it is not itself sinful. Moreover its activities become manifest long before they reach the stature of sin in what are called faults or imperfections.

With this distinction made, *Applied Christianity* does not fall into the confusion which Father Vann alleges, does not make nature “evil” and then proceed to consign all its activities to “outer darkness.” It says indeed that nature must be mortified, for Christians, having a supernatural destiny, must rise above *merely* natural activity; and thus, basing itself on the distinction just made, it provides a *double motive* for mortifying nature. First of all, since nature in the concrete is prone to be led by concupiscence, it needs to be purified; and to the extent that its activities are impelled by concupiscence they may be said to belong to “darkness.” We find a similar doctrine in Father Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., who says:

“St. Thomas maintains the infinite elevation of grace above our nature and also the harmony between the two. But he adds

that this harmony *really appears only after a profound purification of nature*, by mortification and the cross, as the lives of the saints show.” (*Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, p. 54, italics mine.)

The second motive for rising above nature – that is, for supernaturalizing our actions and detaching ourselves from merely natural goods, may also be stated from the above words of Father Garrigou-Lagrange: “the infinite elevation of grace above our nature.” Let it be ever so excellent, nature and its activities and goods are infinitely below the supernatural plane to which all Christians are raised by grace. Hence merely natural activity is not sufficient. It is not evil but it is inadequate: it must be elevated to the higher plane; merely natural goods must be renounced, sometimes in actual fact, and always in spirit and desire by the spirit of detachment. In this sense *Applied Christianity* speaks of “the destruction of our merely human dreams, desires, aspirations, ambitions, attachments”; not as though they were works of darkness, but simply because they belong to the lower plane and we may well be required to relinquish them. What Christian, indeed, has not been called upon to relinquish them, to renounce their *legitimate* dreams, aspirations, and attachments, and not merely the works of the “false self” to which Father Vann would limit mortification – by voluntary self-denial or by the patient endurance of those trials which, sent by Providence, so often deprive us of all the things we hold most dear?

We find, once again, the teaching of *Applied Christianity* in this matter corroborated by Father Garrigou-Lagrange; whose words will also explain why Father Vann has failed to understand this teaching:

“In respect to the supernatural life, we know the principle of St. Thomas: ‘Grace perfects nature and does not destroy it.’ A great spirit of faith is necessary, however, if we are always to interpret this principle correctly without inclining towards naturalism. Some persons will understand this principle materially, or *will be more attentive to nature* which must be perfected than to grace which should produce this transformation in us. Furthermore, considering nature as it actually is since original sin [nature in the concrete, Father Vann,] they will not sufficiently distinguish in nature what is essential and good, what ought to be perfected, *from what ought to be mortified*, egoism under all its forms gross or subtle.” (*Op. cit.*, p. 60 italics mine)

In these words Father Garrigou-Lagrange himself distinguishes both motives that *Applied Christianity* sets forth for self-denial and

detachment from the goods of nature – our infinite elevation by grace over nature and the need of purifying nature as it is in the concrete. Thus he also vindicates the distinction, lying at the basis of this doctrine – which Father Vann says is “at variance with current usage” – between nature considered in itself, in its essence, and nature in the concrete conditions of life. Elsewhere the distinguished Dominican (Father Garrigou-Lagrange, who is truly one of the greatest spiritual writers of our time as well as a great theologian) explicitly makes this distinction and shows its significance. Describing “practical naturalism” (of which we have seen some examples), and noting that this school, cleverly mingling the true with the false, invokes the Thomistic principle holding that “Grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it,” the Dominican doctor goes on:

“As they [i.e., those falling into practical naturalism] lack the spirit of faith, they designedly pervert the principle of St. Thomas which they invoke. *He speaks of nature as such*, in the philosophical sense of the word, of nature with its essential and also its good elements, of the work of God, *and not of wounded, fallen nature, as it actually is in consequence of original sin* and of our personal sins, more or less deformed by our often unconscious egoism, our covetousness, our pride.” (*Three Ages of the Interior Life*; p. 276, italics mine.)

Is that at variance with “current usage” and traditional doctrine? It certainly is greatly at variance with a statement of Father Vann’s which I shall quote in a moment. Denying this distinction so clearly set forth in his confrere’s words, Father Vann is naturally vehement in rejecting the idea that there can be anything wrong with nature in the concrete, that even fallen nature needs to be purified; hence he objects strenuously to *Applied Christianity*’s reference to nature *in the concrete* as “sensual and egotistic.” How then will Father Vann explain the words of the *Imitation* about “the divers motions of nature and grace,” nature according to this spiritual classic pulling us in a direction opposed to the influence of grace? Can this famous chapter (III, 54) be understood other than as speaking of nature in the concrete? Or are we to suppose that the *Imitation* opposes the teaching of St. Thomas and postulates an opposition between grace and nature considered in its essence? Observe that Father Garrigou-Lagrange attributes the denial of this most necessary distinction to “practical naturalism”; of which what we have been calling pious naturalism is a very common form and one having high authority, as Father Vann is showing us. By suppressing this

distinction, by acknowledging only nature in its essential goodness and rejecting the concept of nature in the concrete, pious naturalism is enabled to indulge the wayward impulses of fallen nature while sanctifying them by an appeal to the axiom of St. Thomas. Thus the confusion makes it possible for this school to justify its sham and gaudy piety. A very pleasant piety, too. For it makes St. Thomas's "relatively optimistic" view of human nature considered in itself an excuse for denying the practical consequences of the Fall, hence for the need to justify nature. A truly comforting piety – for those who love this world.

Lest Father Vann should think that *Applied Christianity*, or even the *Imitation*, exaggerates the corruption of nature in its actual state, we put down the following definition of nature in the concrete from Cardinal Pie:

"Considering its actual and real state, and notwithstanding the goodness of its essential elements, nature is sin." (*Op. cit.*, p. 156)

Can these words, or those of the *Imitation*, or the ones quoted above from Father Garrigou-Lagrange, be used to corroborate Father Vann's statement that "it is of nature *in the concrete* that Catholicism holds this relatively optimist view" [of human nature]? But the true absurdity of his position is shown in a sentence in which, in the very act of denying the distinction between the two meanings of the word nature, he himself makes it. he says:

"Grace does not destroy nature – nature in the concrete, nature with all its sin and egoism – it heals and sanctifies it *by destroying the sin within it.*" (italics mine)

Note how the italicized words nullify the rest of the sentence. Father Vann is like a man who strides off in one direction, then turns about so quickly as to collide with himself. He tells us that grace does not destroy nature, even nature in the concrete; then he tells us that it destroys sin in nature. That is to say, he dares not affirm the harmony of grace and nature *without abstracting from the concrete conditions in which nature exists*. Here we cannot simply affirm the harmony between grace and nature in the concrete, but must add the nullifying clause "*by destroying the sin within it.*" It is like saying: "Grace presupposes nature – even nature in the concrete, let it be emphatically said – provided we abstract from the actual condition of sin in which nature concretely exists."

We hope it has not escaped the reader's attention how Father Vann's whole statement flatly contradicts the teaching of the *Imitation* and of his learned confrere, as just quoted. We should also point out, from this last

passage, that it is Father Vann, not *Applied Christianity*, that speaks of the *sinfulness* of human nature. *Applied Christianity*, which Father Vann accuses of exaggerating original sin, follows a milder doctrine, i.e., that it is concupiscence, and not sin, which turns our nature awry, and that while this concupiscence will eventually lead to sin if not mortified, it meanwhile spoils our actions with many minor blemishes and imperfections which sincere spiritual effort will strive to remove by mortification.



We have now replied to most of Father Vann's objections. Of those remaining, a few are but short slurring remarks, scarcely worthy of an answer, except that the merest word may sometimes stir up the gravest doubts.¹¹¹ In any case, some of these criticisms do not need an answer, at least from me, since Father Vann has provided it himself. Thus he reproaches *Applied Christianity* for saying that the Pharisees were "good people." The point is not seriously important, being a matter of judgment rather than of doctrine; and I have in any case met the criticism before. (*Nature and the Supernatural*, p. 102 [p. 92 our edition]) But what is interesting to note here is that Father Vann himself, in one of his books, speaks of the Pharisees as living "the good life" (See his book, *The Heart of Man*, p 67), using them, almost exactly as *Applied Christianity* does, as an example of mere natural justice as distinct from supernatural justice.

Again, Father Vann misrepresents *Applied Christianity's* teaching on the relationship of faith and reason, seeing in the doctrine therein set forth, inculcating the duty to live by faith, a denial of the "*fides quærens intellectum* and the whole massive achievement of the philosophers and theologians of the Church." (*Orate Fratres*, p. 102) And he says this despite the fact that *Applied Christianity* had previously guarded against any such misunderstanding by speaking explicitly (p. 27 [p. 30, 1944 ed.]) of the harmony between faith and reason. No, *Applied Christianity* does not urge that we "abandon" reason or the *fides quærens intellectum*; but it would certainly deny the *intellectus quærens fidem*, that is, it would oppose the belief that faith is no higher than reason, that the teaching of faith may be compassed by mere rationalism, that living by faith puts no

111. We mention, only to dismiss, his statement – put forth without evidence, as usual – that *Applied Christianity* teaches mortification without explaining the relation of ends and means. The book clearly defines the end of Christian life as love, union with God (see esp. the chapter on Christian Perfection), in relation to which mortification is but a means, though a necessary means.

strain upon, involves no burden for the natural man. But, again, what is of particular significance here is that Father Vann has himself written (*The Heart of Man*, p. 40), “But in its own domain reason must also die.” This might easily be interpreted as anti-rationalism – ripped from its context. In fact it is in effect saying the same thing that *Applied Christianity* says, i.e., that living by faith, which is so high above reason, is a mortification, a death in the mystical sense for mere reason.¹¹² But the point here is that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Or what weighting of the scales can make what is truth in *The Heart of Man* error in *Applied Christianity*?

There is another of Father Vann’s minor criticisms that we cannot pass by, so fully does it disclose the nature, method, and even value of his criticism. He says (*Orate Fratres*, p. 104):

“There are sentences in which the thought is so muddled as to defy analysis; as, for instance, when we are told that ‘actions filled with egotism . . . would be meritorious provided that they do not actually transgress any law of God’ – as though egotism were quite compatible with the law of God.”

We might again object to Father Vann’s lifting sentences – worse yet, incomplete sentences – out of their context. But there is something else even more astonishing here. The words which he quotes from *Applied Christianity*, – not easy to find (p. 202 [p. 212 our edition] of the 1944 edition; p. 205 of the new printing), *are part of an erroneous view* which *Applied Christianity* is stating for sake of criticizing and refuting. They in no sense represent the teaching of the book but on the contrary are an opinion that the book is opposing. And yet Father Vann attributes this opinion to me! With what unpardonable levity is Father Vann hereby shown to have assumed the self-appointed task of inquisition! What unbelievable temerity is revealed in his readiness to judge and condemn, and that in the most solemn manner, a work which he has clearly not even troubled himself to read to the extent of distinguishing what it

112. True, Father Vann, who is ignorant of the self-denial that follows upon our supernatural elevation, does not see that faith in itself in a mortification for reason at its best. He therefore understands by the mortification of reason either a mere natural ascesis or a purification made necessary by the Fall. Still, to this limited extent his teaching corresponds to that of *Applied Christianity* and he demands a *death* for reason. – Concerning Father Vann’s inadequate, inaccurate, and misleading ideas on mortification, we will not speak in this reply; their consideration would require a treatise by itself.

stands for and what it opposes! His methods throughout, and this last most grievous offense, compel us to say – not forgetting that the former critics of *Applied Christianity* did not scruple at lifting words from their context – that this criticism in *Orate Fratres* is the most crudely dishonest and unscrupulous of them all.

In a book published several years ago, Father Vann argued cogently that even great nations, engaged in international war, must, if they are desirous of having their actions meet ethical standards, conform to the requirements not alone of justice, but of supernatural charity. Can he now justify his own violation, not only of charity against one who is after all a fellow-priest, but also of the most elementary natural justice?



One last matter remains to be taken up. Warmed to his theme, Father Vann – such is always the end of these inquisitions – must needs make it a heresy hunt. What he finds in the teaching of *Applied Christianity*, he says, is “a startling resemblance to the teaching of Protestantism.”

Strange that the former critics, learned men, and not averse to finding heresies in *Applied Christianity*, as the reader may recall, did not notice this particular resemblance, despite the fact that it is “startling.” In what does the resemblance lie? According to Father Vann, *Applied Christianity* has too exalted a view of the giddy height of grace over nature. Grace, he says, defining – rather caricaturing – the teaching of the book, is “that strange elusive entity which floats, for Fr. Hugo, somewhere in a blessed vacuum remote from the rough and tumble of human affairs and human hearts.” (*Orate Fratres*, p. 104) This is the basis of the “startling resemblance,” since, Father Vann explains, “for the Reformers, grace is, so to say, at a tangent to nature...” With this error Father Vann contrasts the true view – or what he calls the true view – of Catholicism:

“... for the Catholic tradition it [grace] is on the contrary precisely *in nature*. Its function is not to save man by providing him with a new and meritorious life in a realm quite *other* than of nature; but on the contrary to save him by redeeming and elevating his nature itself.” (*Orate Fratres*, p. 101; italics mine.)

We have already shown the baselessness of the charge that, for *Applied Christianity*, grace is “a strange elusive entity that floats in a blessed vacuum”; or that for it, as Father Vann further mis-states its teaching, “the two domains never become intermingled.” It holds, as already observed, that nature is to be transformed and its activity

elevated by grace: instead of grace being represented as remote from the hurly-burly of every day, the hurly-burly of every day is shown to become meritorious through correspondence with grace. This, we repeat, is the quintessential doctrine of the book.

Nor is there any ground for the statement that for *Applied Christianity*, as for the Re-formers, “grace is, to to say, at a tangent to nature.” It is in reality the doctrine of *Applied Christianity* that grace *renews* nature and makes men “*new creatures*.” (II Cor. 5, 17) It says, for example:

“A blacksmith plunges steel into a fire and applies the bellows. Under the action of the heat, the metal first reddens, then comes to a white heat, finally turns liquid. It is still essentially the same; it is just as much steel now as before. Yet it has been transformed, and, in this new condition, it can be readily worked on and made to take all kinds of shapes ... So must our human nature be transformed by grace; it likewise will remain essentially the same; but when it is penetrated through and through with the divine action, it will be soft and pliant, readily following the impulses of grace.” (p. 25, 1944 ed. [p. 28 our edition])

This is precisely what the Reformers *denied*, i.e., that human nature is renewed or transformed by grace; for them the justified soul is merely “covered over” by Christ’s merits. *Applied Christianity* takes as the basis of its practical teaching a doctrine whose denial is the fundamental tenet of Protestantism. Yet Father Vann, with perceptive powers surely not of this world, finds a “startling” resemblance.¹¹³

Then Father Vann goes on to explain what he thinks is the correct view; and in so doing he once more betrays the essential naturalism of his outlook and the reason for his assault on *Applied Christianity* with its clear statement of our supernatural duties. He says that “for the Catholic tradition it [grace] is on the contrary precisely *in* nature.” Father Vann has accused *Applied Christianity*, falsely as we have seen, of using formulas that depart from current usage. What about this formula which

113. According to Father Garrigou-Lagrange, and contrary to Father Vann *it was precisely the forgetfulness or denial* of the immense height of grace that led to the Lutheran error. The former writes: “At the beginning of a treatise on the interior life, *it is important to get a high idea of sanctifying grace*. Protestantism, following several nominalists of the fourteenth century, has lost the conception of it. In Luther’s opinion, man is justified *not by a new infused life*, but by the exterior imputation of the merits of Christ...” (*Three Ages of the Interior Life*, p. 29, footnote. Italics mine)

says that grace is “in nature”? Where is it to be found in traditional doctrine? I have heard of nature being elevated by grace (and that is the usage of *Applied Christianity*) but never, until reading Father Vann, that grace is *in* nature – as though it were something less than nature, a mere part of nature.

Of course, there is a sense in which grace may be said to be in nature, so we have just heard from *Applied Christianity* that through grace nature is “penetrated through and through with the divine action.” And in this sense – which *Applied Christianity* thus expressly teaches and does not deny – the Council of Trent defines justification as a “sanctification and renovation of *the interior man* through the voluntary reception of grace and gifts, *sanctificatio et renovatio interioris hominis*.” (D. B. 799)

But it is certainly incorrect to say that grace is *in nature* if it is meant that grace is but a part of nature, less than nature, a mere modification of nature, with more concern being given to nature which is to be perfected than to grace which is to perfect it. To assent to this is to fall into naturalism. And yet this is the view of Father Vann. Not that he would adhere to it if conscious of it – though, as we shall see at once, he does state it expressly in words; but his whole spirit is that of naturalism, zealous for nature, negligent of grace, emphasizing and even overemphasizing the rights of the former while being quite careless of the demands of the latter. Observe what he says:

“Its [grace’s] function is *not* to provide him with a *new* and meritorious life in a realm quite *other* than that of nature; but on the contrary to save him by redeeming and elevating his nature itself.” (*Orate Fratres*, p. 101)

We have no quarrel with the last part of the sentence, which is correct and is also the teaching of *Applied Christianity*. But for Father Vann it is emptied of content by what he has just said in the first part: Grace, he tells us, is *not a new life*. And yet the Scriptures say that whoever is justified by grace is a “*new creature*.” (II Cor. 5, 17) And the Council of Trent, as just remarked, defines justification as a *renewal, renovatio*. Then Father Vann goes on to say that grace is *not* a new life “in a realm quite *other* than that of nature.” indeed, is it then *in* the realm of nature? Part of nature? On the same plane as nature? How then can Father Vann say (correctly this time) that it *elevates* nature? How can it elevate nature to anything other than nature (not to say higher than nature) if it is itself not other than nature? We have quoted the words of Father Garrigou-Lagrange speaking of the “infinite elevation of grace above our nature,” reproaching those who deny it with practical naturalism. And he says this because grace is

defined by Catholic theology as “a participation in the divine life.” Yet Father Vann would tell us that grace is not even *other* than nature, much less quite other. What has happened to the *infinite* elevation? Are our possession of a nature and our endowment with grace facts on the same plane of reality? Is participation in the divine life merely a right or property of nature?

Preposterous as these last suggestions may appear, they really seem to be Father Vann’s meaning. Earlier in his article, he has spoken of how “the true self” was killed by sin, and he gives this interesting definition of what he means by the true self: “...the true life [in this sentence he equates life and self] which is a sharing in God’s life through the adoption of sons.” According to this, one’s natural self – considered apart from sin – is a participation in the divine life. What is in fact given to man by grace – participation in the divine life – is conceded to him by Father Vann as part of his nature. This is Pelagianism (in turn a form of naturalism), which conceived of grace and eternal salvation as belonging to man by nature.

No doubt Father Vann does not mean all this; but he says it. And it shows how muddled his own thinking is, how imperfectly he has thought these matters through, although he speaks of *Applied Christianity* as being muddled. The fact is that the muddle is in his own mind and is increased by his habit of random selection, incomplete quotation, and misquotation.

But what is to the point here is Father Vann’s spirit: his tendency to derogate grace, to exalt nature; the spirit of naturalism. Consequently, then, it is for him a matter of reproach that, according to *Applied Christianity*, “our chief interest should be in grace.” (*Orate Fratres*, p. 104) Of course! isn’t yours, Father Vann? Whatever your opinion, *Applied Christianity* has no apologies for its teaching here! It is more concerned with grace than with nature (although holding also that nature is perfectible by grace); it believes also in the *infinite* elevation of grace over nature, and finally, that through grace we are *new* creatures. He who denies these things is departing from Catholic doctrinal tradition, is rejecting the specifically supernatural character of Christianity.